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ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND THE MEANINGS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS CULTURAL MEDIUMS: A CASE STUDY OF INTRAMURAL SPORT PARTICIPANTS' INTERPRETATIONS OF ONLINE PRESENCE

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ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND THE MEANINGS OF SOCIAL
MEDIA AS CULTURAL MEDIUMS: A CASE STUDY OF INTRAMURAL SPORT
PARTICIPANTS' INTERPRETATIONS OF ONLINE PRESENCE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts
Communication, Technology & Society

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the relationship between organizational communication and social media presence in organizational culture. Using a university intramural sport program (UIM) as a case study, this study addresses the role of organizational members' interpretations of the introduction of social media into organizational processes and culture. This study is an attempt to reveal a disconnect between organizational communication techniques and social media as cultural mediums by offering an interpretive approach to analysis of the UIM culture using Craig and Tracy's (1995) grounded practical theory. Ten interviews with UIM student employees and sport players were conducted and data were analyzed qualitatively. Findings show, first, that the interviewees characterize their involvement with UIM as a cultural experience. Second, the interviewees question UIM presence on social media. Last, the data was examined using Craig and Tracy's (1995) problem-centered model, and organized into three inter-related levels: the technical level, the problem level, and the philosophical level. In summary, this analysis identifies key concerns around and related to organizational communication techniques, participant's cultural experience, and social media as cultural mediums.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my dad. Most consider your death my greatest loss, but I consider having you as my guardian angel to be my greatest gain. While I've missed you for ten years, I am privileged beyond measure to have had you for fourteen. You have sat next to me throughout this project and encouraged me during the toughest writing days. From building my science projects to gluing sequins on my tap shoes, I'll never be able to describe how thankful I am to be your daughter. I love you and I miss you, Daddy.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Collegiate intramural sport organizations are very unique cultures. A non-commercial organization, intramural sport programs are popular social cultures on campuses that attract athletes at all levels. Many collegiate recreation departments house intramural sport programs that take recreational sport play from sandlot leagues to organized competitive environments. Intramural sports differs from collegiate club sports, where students try-out for the team and fund their own participation, or varsity sports, where students are recruited and receive funding for playing for the college. Funded largely by student fees, these programs provide a sense of community within the walls of campus (Artinger, Clapham, Hunt, Meigs, Milord, Sampson, and Forrester, 2006) where participation is purely voluntary and the program caters to all sport skill levels. Intramural sports provide a powerful medium for student interaction (Belch, Gebel, & Mass, 2001), and like communication mediums, “sport can serve as a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, values, and norms,” (Artinger, et al., 2006, p. 72). Its size in membership and space for student interaction indicate how important intramural sport programs are on college campuses and, therefore, provide an interesting opportunity for inquiry about student culture. Recently, a university intramural (UIM) sports program, whose name remains undisclosed for confidentiality purposes, adopted Facebook and Twitter social media accounts to use as communication mediums within the organization.

With so many non-commercial organizations utilizing these social media accounts to connect with their members online, UIM affords a raw opportunity to inquire about the student employee and sport player interpretations of UIM's online presence through social media.

This is a case study of the UIM sport program, whose institution is ranked among the top 25 national public institutions, according to *U.S. News & World Report's* annual guide to "America's Best Colleges," in 2013. ("Top Public Schools – Rankings – Top National Universities – US News," 2013). According to the 2013 *Princeton Review*, this university also ranks in the top five ranking of Jock Schools, based on the popularity of intercollegiate and intramural sports, and among the top five colleges where everyone plays intramural sports ("School Rankings," 2013). In the 2011-2012 academic school year, UIM employed and managed 69 student staff members and 3,700 student participants in the Fall semester, and 101 student staff members and 4,842 student participants in the Spring. In the same academic year, UIM organized over twelve different sport leagues and several special event recreation tournaments, providing opportunity for all levels of recreational, competition, and socialization on the university's campus.

UIM uses several online communication mediums, such as email through student listserves, organized sport computer software, a website on the university's webpage, and various flyers or posters to better reach and organize a large number of members dispersed throughout a campus town. Recently, UIM adopted Facebook and Twitter social media accounts. Online social spaces for UIM allow participants the possibility to

experience the organization on interfaces that differ from the sport playing spaces. Put simply, the accounts are a place where members can go to get information from the organization and they offer the ability for members to become part of intramural sport dialogue online.

Seemingly unproblematic, UIM is doing something not unlike many commercial and non-commercial organizations: adopting social media accounts for online presence. The use of social media technologies (i.e., blogs, wikis, social networking sites, social tagging, and microblogging) in organizations presents social affordances in addition to other traditional computer mediated communication (CMC) (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Trending among collegiate and university organizations is the adoption and adaption of social media accounts as additional communication tools, and as interfaces for social interaction. An organizational decision on communication technologies, arguably, is based on how they will reach and resonate with their members with a high degree of message fidelity and social capabilities. Social media interfaces serve as a different way for communicating both internally and externally by expanding into public online accounts. While these types of media technology provide a space for multi-way communication, collaboration, and interaction—they also can be an inept, or even useless, medium for a particular organization. Thus, social media spaces pose a challenge for organizations to (1) apply a questioning attitude towards their potential effect on the organizational culture that preceded the adoption of the technologies, and (2) adapt the technologies to sustain the organizational culture online that already existed offline.

I used interpretive methods to approach UIM as a case study for a few reasons.

First, I wanted to know the student employee and sport player's interpretations of the intramural sport social culture, as it exists offline. Second, I wanted to know their interpretations towards UIM adopting and adapting Facebook and Twitter as a communication technique. From these inquiries, I sought to know if offline presence in sport playing spaces could transfer to online presence in social media spaces. Ultimately, I am interested in the meanings of social media as cultural mediums in organizational communication from the perspectives of the members who are encouraged to use them. This study attempts to fill the gap between how culture is experienced offline and online after introducing social media into the organization as a management fashion (Abrahamson, 1996).

By examining how members react when organizations extend boundaries into online social spaces, we can come to understand the problems associated with organizations adopting these accounts, thus, addressing an important area of study where communication practices intersect with organizational culture and social media ideals. Treem and Leonardi (2013) point out that “despite the increased adoption of social media by firms, the implication of these new technologies for organizational processes are not yet well understood by communication researchers” (p. 144). This period of transition where UIM is adapting to new communication technologies provides insight into organizational communication and culture. What does it mean for an organization to have an online social presence and how does that manifest itself in organizational culture?

Using an interpretive approach from interviews with UIM student employees and sport players, I will use Craig and Tracy's (1995) grounded practical theory (GPT) to let

communication theory influence practice. Craig (2006) suggests that communication studies as a discipline “now plays an active role in cultivating the practice of communication in society” (p. 41). From subjective inquiry, research can show how these social media techniques in organizational discourse can have beneficial, neutral, or show negative effects on organizational culture. Using communication research to inquire about communication techniques used in a professional setting will provide both academic and practical purpose for both commercial and non-commercial organizations. This study offers a unique inside look at how UIM student employees and sport players feel about the ideals of social media and how those are practiced within intramurals. It thereby contributes to research on organizational communication by reflecting on, and debunking, popular myths of communication techniques used in industry.

In this case study, I examine how UIM student employees and sport players interpret UIM culture by asking (1) their experiences with UIM in sport playing spaces, and (2) their interpretations of UIM’s online presence on Facebook and Twitter. In Chapter Two, I review research on organizational culture and communication, social presence, and social media and culture. Next, in Chapter Three, I describe my analytical framework using Craig and Tracy’s (1995) method of analyzing UIM’s practical theory of communication, and data collection processes. In Chapters Four and Five, I present the data as it pertains to UIM culture offline (Chapter Four) and UIM social presence via communication techniques (Chapter Five). In Chapter Six, the core of the case study, I reconstruct UIM’s practical theory of communication based on the participant interpretations using Craig and Tracy’s (1995) GPT problem-centered model: the

philosophical level, the problem level, and the technical level. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I conclude with a discussion on the participant's ideals of UIM's transparent communication tactics and present new insight on where social presence is felt based how the participant's experience UIM culture. By reconstructing UIM's practical theory of communication, I invite researchers and organizational leaders to identify organizational culture in spaces that precede organizational fashions like online social media spaces, and resist to adopting popular myths of new age communication technologies forever replacing "old school" mediums.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature will be divided into two main areas of scholarship: the first addressing organizational communication and cultural studies, the second addressing media research pertaining to computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social media culture. I will also critically examine assumptions embedded in popular discourse about organization's social media adoption through the analysis of organization members' perspectives and experiences. In the first section, I will introduce the study of culture as it is present in communication literature, themes of organizational culture, and a symbolist perspective of looking at what shapes an organization. In the second section, I will engage in conversations around “new” media, social presence, social media in cultural studies, and social spaces. This order is consistent with the upcoming analysis chapters that first address communication and organizational culture, and then communication in social media spaces.

Organizational Communication: Organizations as Cultural

Instead of thinking about organizations as an entity that has fixed bounds, I will begin this discussion of organizational communication by focusing on the social aspects that shape its culture. According to Katz and Kahn (1978), “social structures are essentially contrived,” and events, happenings, or patterns of behavior that give structure to the social organization and are held together by human’s, “attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, motivations, habits, and expectations of human beings,” (p. 37). This differs

from the traditional theories of biological systems that are physically bound, which focus more on the inputs and outputs of systems rather than cultural experience. Because of this, social systems are more difficult to locate and comprehend from an outside perspective. Those within a social organization begin to, “identify the buildings, the technological equipment, and the people they contain as the structure of the organization,” to make conceptualizations about their membership (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 37). This idea of identifying with technological equipment will be more pertinent later in the discussion of social media interfaces.

Since the mid 1980’s, cultural studies have situated themselves in communication studies, beginning with the transdisciplinary influence of French poststructuralist trinity of Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault (Sewell, 1999). According to Cheney et al. (2011), “the culture of an organization is embedded in and expressed by patterns and habits of communication,” (p. 75). The ways in which organizations communicate are innately cultural, and the concept of culture is linked to the study of organizations (Smircich, 1983). Communication shapes an organization’s culture, and an organization’s culture is experienced through its communication (Cheney, et al, 2011). To begin, I will first address a metatheoretical position of the reality of culture as it relates to this study.

Reality of culture. Approaching a study of culture can be overwhelming, as there are many ways to consider the reality of its existence. Martin’s (2003) discussion of ontological differences addresses the differing realities of culture as it relates to organizational cultural studies. Referring to Chia (1996), “being-realism,” (p. 36) is one way of seeing culture in that it is real, it is represented in language, and is treated as

unproblematic (Martin, 2003). The limit to this way of knowing culture is that culture remains unchallenged, which does not open up space for change. Another approach to culture is “becoming realism” (Chia, 1996, p. 34), which focuses on a more socially constructed reality of culture and how observations, data, and analysis help to create theories of culture that can then define culture. While both have contributed to this body of literature, I am less concerned about how to define culture within a bounds of some sort, but rather how culture is experienced and understood through the organization. Culture will not neither be advanced as a means to an end, or a fixed reality, but as subjective experience to only be understood for meaning through practice.

This way of experiencing culture comes with inherent challenges. Williams (1983) stated, “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language,” (p. 50). There are many ways culture is understood by scholars, and it is normally divided into categories about culture being a system of symbols and meanings or it being a system of practice (Sewell, 1999). As complimentary concepts, both ideas will be useful in looking at the culture of intramural sport and their ways of communicating within the UIM spaces from the member’s perspective. Even more simply, Cheney, et al (2011) adds, “ethnographers and others who study culture think of these dimensions of cultures and organizations as the social bonds—the “glue,” if you will—that holds the community together,” (p. 80). This way of studying the many dimensions that make an experience *cultural* is inclusive of all concepts provided by a member’s experience in the organization without discrediting others.

Themes of organizational culture. Smircich (1983) classifies intersecting themes of organization and culture in organizational and management research. Because this study will use subjective experience, themes of organizational cognition and organizational symbolism are pertinent. First, Smircich (1983) says that culture is a system of shared cognition made up by human minds and by sets of rules, thus organizations are systems of knowledge in a network of subjective meanings and appear to, “function in a rule-like manner” (p. 342). Second, Smircich (1983) classifies culture as, “a system of shared symbols and meanings,” and organizations are maintained by, “patterns of symbolic discourse,” to facilitate shared meanings (p. 342). The idea here is to establish that culture is experienced by symbols and cognition and the concepts working together give meaning to an organization.

Symbolist perspective. Based on discussion of social organizations and how to approach studies of culture, I will adopt a symbolist perspective in order to study the very, “nonrational, subjective, and interpretive aspects of organizational life,” that exists in the intramural sport culture (Cheney, et al, 2011, p. 88). Sewell (1999) reminds us that cultures are often contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, and subject to change. Brunsson (1985) acknowledges the difficulties in organizational consistency based on the recognition that people are in the organization for many reasons and have different interest and goals. Especially in the case of an intramural sport program, Cheney, et al (2011) indicates these aspects of organizations by saying:

How do you think emphasis on consistency, predictability, integration, and order actually limit an organization’s creativity and adaptability—not to mention

diminishing the joy of its members? Also, consider how consistency traps an organization by not allowing it the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. Think of universities, sports teams, or religious institutions as diverse examples of organizations that would have great difficulties being consistent all the time. (p. 88)

The important take away here is that sport culture is dynamic. Members within the intramural sport culture have different associations with the organizations, and differing levels of interest. Some take the competition very seriously, and some are more entertained by the social, recreational affordances. These differences in sport culture can manifest themselves through dialogue, especially in social media spaces allowing for open interaction. Managing organizations means managing how culture, and culture is shaped through dialogue in organizational spaces.

In this study, I treat organizations *as cultural*. As Smircich (1981) says, “culture is something an organization is,” (p. 347), and following suit I will treat CUIM as an organization that is cultural, rather than *doing* culture or *having* culture. To demonstrate, when observing an organization using this perspective, the researcher may ask him or herself, “What does this organization tell us about the values, rituals, and symbols that organizations present as manifestations of their culture?” (Cheney, et al., 2011, p. 89). Regarding this case study, UIM’s transition period of change in communication mediums and adopting social media accounts provides a raw opportunity to reflect on intramural culture as it is experienced by members within social media spaces.

Paradigms of change within organizational culture. Changes to an organization's way of communicating and assembling together are intimately linked to changes in patterns of behavior, values, and meanings. Meyerson and Martin (1987) present three different paradigms on cultural changes: integration, differentiation, and ambiguity. The third paradigm of viewing cultural change, ambiguity, can address a non-threatening change, such as social media initiation into an organized sport culture where membership is loosely integrated and isn't necessarily, "harmonious or full of conflict," (p. 637). In this way, change is introduced into an organization where cultural manifestations to individual members are not necessarily consistent or inconsistent. For example, a software change could be traumatic to the whole of the organization, paradigm one, or a leadership change could cause temporary inconsistencies within the employee staff. Albeit all changes that could affect the culture of the organization, ambiguity allows researchers and cultural members the ability to look for, "confusion, paradox, and perhaps even hypocrisy – that which is not clear," (Meyerson and Martin, 1987, p. 637). While social media adoption may be seemingly neutral, an open forum for member interaction could imply inconsistencies or hypocrisy with perceived culture within an organization.

While this discussion has presented many lenses for looking at organizational communication, it can be deduced that organizational culture is both a practice and system of symbols and meanings. Organizational culture is contradictory, loosely integrated, contested, and constant to change (Sewell, 1999). It is experienced subjectively and ideals often differ from one another. Research targeting organizational

culture focuses on the consistencies of culture, or lack there of, and how those manifest themselves to indicate aspects of culture.

Social Media as Cultural: Online Presence

A review of CMC literature based primarily around topics of social media can be challenging because this sort of media, while seemingly “new,” is based on a long standing tradition of using multiple channels in different ways to communicate with others. Jankowski (2006) states that, “newness is a relative notion with regard to time and space,” arguing that new media is a socially constructed phenomena (p. 56). Baym (2006) adds, “we must remember that the computer may be new, but like the many new media that came before, it is only a medium,” (p. 50). Therefore, it should be stated upfront that I do not wish to present social media interfaces as necessarily a “new” phenomena but rather fashionable ways for organizations to engage in more interpersonal communication with members in online interfaces.

While its hard to know exactly when, where or how the idea of social media came to be, Bercovici (2010) attributes its first-time use to Ted Leonsis, former executive at AOL in 1997, when he said, “social media, places where they can be entertained, communicate, and participate in a social environment.” In communication scholarship, according to Treem and Leonardi (2013), some scholars try to treat social media as a genre of CMC (Herring, 2004), and others treat social media as a distinct category of technologies (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Leonardi (2009) argues social media as a technology becomes mutually constituted within organizational communication processes. In this case study, I will refer to Facebook and Twitter as social media

communication tools. I will start by discussing social presence as it is presented in communication studies, the interaction aspect of social media, and social media as it relates to cultural studies. Last, I will discuss the skepticisms around the popular progressive narrative of social media and the ideas of technology and social spaces.

Social presence in communication studies. A discussion of social presence will lend itself to address the participant's feeling towards being a member of UIM social media spaces. The term presence has been used in communication studies to refer to one's natural feeling of being in an environment (Steuer, 1992). Lee (2004) said that presence works when studying human interaction with media and simulation technologies because the degree to which media can represent the physical and social world is a core question since communication research first began. Media technologies simulate interactions with people and places; therefore, communication researchers have worked to theorize about the social interaction between human-computer interfaces (Lemish, 1982; Lombard, 1995; Sheridan, 1992; Biocca et al., 2001; Steuer, 1992; Short, et al., 1976; Nass & Moon, 2000; Lee, 2004).

There are several ways that researchers have characterized presence: telepresence (Minsky, 1980), virtual presence (Sheridan, 1992), or mediated presence (Biocca et al., 2001). Rather than reference each way presence has been used, a discussion of mediated presence (Biocca et al., 2001) as it has been used in media studies and Lee's conceptualization of social presence (Lee, 2004) would be most appropriate when applying it to a study of social media technologies. Lee (2004) argues that allowing presence to stand alone frees the term from being technology-specific and, therefore, can

be applied to future technology and future presence-related phenomena that doesn't have to do with transporting into virtual phenomena. Lee (2004) says, as an example, "without feeling that they are moving to a virtual conference room, teleconference users can feel the presence of conversation partners to a great degree," (p. 30). This notion brings into question how the participants feel present in the UIM social media interfaces.

There exists a difference between natural perception and mediated perception in one's environment, however, especially in the case of UIM, both the online social media space and natural sport space are mediated. Therefore, I side with Steuer (1992) and lay the foreground by saying that that presence is the feeling in which a person feels a sense of being in an environment, without specifying a domain. Biocca, et al (2001) defines social presence as, "the sense of being together with another and mental models of other intelligences (i.e., people, animals, agents, gods, etc.) that help us simulate other minds," (p. 2). Biocca, et al (2001) also states that there exists a difference between one's physical body and one's virtual body and that influences the user's image and what social role the user plays. Lombard and Ditton (1997) say that while someone might be physically situated somewhere, social presence is the feeling of being together with someone.

Connecting this to media, we can go back to Short, et al (1976) who first conceptualized the subjective or objective feeling of social richness of media as, "having a high degree of social presence are judged as being warm, of a medium personal, sensitive, and sociable," (p. 66). Together, these ideas of presence will lend itself to understanding the UIM employee and sport player interpretations of the UIM spaces,

both on the sport domains and the online social media domains, and in what spaces do they feel socially present.

Interacting with social media. Hollingshead & Contractor (2006) point out that, “Indeed, we are witnessing the emergence new media not simply as a conduit but also as an agent,” (p. 114). Making a choice in communication mediums is more about what are the many ways in which adopters can interact with others within the communicative space. The agency of social media works to, “facilitate the creation, maintenance and dissolution of groups among individuals who interact over one or more of a variety of channels (audio, video, text, and graphics) offered by several forums (such as Internet, newsgroups, online chat sessions via Instant Messenger, and corporate intranets),” (Hollingshead & Contractor, 2006, p. 114). There are many technology forums that can be considered social media: wikis, social networking applications (i.e. Facebook), blogs, social tagging, and microblogging (i.e. Twitter) to name a few (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Benefits to this type of new media include: the decentralization of messages, increased capability for message travel, increased ability for audience members to get involved in the communication, interactive forms of communication, and better options for content with the digitalization of content (McQuail, 1994).

What is relevant in this study is how new media is presented in cultural studies and how it blurs the line between interpersonal use and group organization. Treem and Leonardi (2012) say that, “social media affordances may alter socialization, knowledge sharing, and power processes in organizations,” (p. 144). While social media is hypothesized to contribute to the identities of organizations and strengthen their stories

and missions (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2009), Treem and Leonardi (2013) point out that, “scholarship has largely failed to explain if and how uses of social media in organizations differ from exiting forms of computer-mediated communication,” (p. 144). This study’s exploration of organizational culture and social media will add to the emerging scholarship.

Social media and culture. Much like scholars having a tendency to present new media as new phenomena, Slack and Wise (2006) states that new media technologies are often treated as if they were, “completely revolutionary, capable of changing everything and likely to do so,” (p. 139). Instead of thinking about social media being a major shift in the way an organization communicates, it is more advantageous to discuss the relationships between technologies and culture because both communication technology and culture are an ongoing conversation. Slack and Wise (2006) contend that scholars who study culture and technology accept that, “technology is not neutral, that technology does not cause cultural change (or vice versa) in any simple way, that the relationship between technology and culture is contingent not determined, that neither we or technology are slave to the other, and that technological development is not necessarily progress,” (p. 143). This statement is somewhat unsatisfying because it doesn’t seem to position a relationship of culture and technology as being relevant. Something to consider from this assertion is the narrative of technology always meaning progress in society, and trends of expanding into online spaces.

Skepticism of progress. A common cultural conception of technology is the narrative of progress with the development of new technology. Adopting social media

may give an organization the prospects of new and better ways to communicate with their members. What is interesting about Slack and Wise's (2006) research is their skepticism of progress with new media, made evident by the author's assertion, "dare we be explicit about the fact that not all technological development is progress?" (p. 148). This perspective of regarding technology, or social media, as neutral could indicate a questioning or skeptical attitude towards its utility. For example, in their case study, McMillan and Hyde (2000) discuss the pressures to adopt the technological progress narrative and how challenging these movements can be. Skepticism to media adoption may not be the most popular route to cultural studies of technology (Slack & Wise, 2006), but such considerations could bring light to how social media is possibly having a neutral effect, or even showing negative consequences in organizational culture.

Technology and social space. Another cultural conception of technology is that of social space (Grossberg, 1993). Continuing with the notion that culture and technology are contingent agents, "The social in this approach is inherently and predominately spatial; the spatial dimensions of technology are social," (Slack & Wise, 2006, p. 153). Some scholars believe that technology is spatially bias and a choice in medium has consequences for shaping a particular society and have larger implications to promote control. Control over spatial technology democratizes its uses, therefore the sociality of the medium becomes less fluid and more regulated. Surveillance and the idea of an organizations gaze (Foucault, 1977) can be an additional motivator for organizations to adopt social media interfaces, and consequently for members to refrain from taking part in the space.

Lefebvre (1991) conceptualizes ways of thinking about social space as it relates to technology. What is relevant to this study is the idea that, “spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion,” (Slack & Wise, 2006, p. 155). Social organizations, like communities, emerge by system infrastructure, temporal structure, participant characteristics and external contexts (Baym, 2006). Though loosely bound and more difficult to locate from an outsiders perspective, social organizations utilize online interfaces because, “members of groups no longer need to be formally constituted or to be co-present (in time or place) to collaborate, share information or socialize,” (Hollingshead & Contractor, 2006, p. 114). Co-presence and co-location in organizational online social media interfaces can give members a sense of being together when spatially apart (Biocca, et al, 2001). Conversely, Wellman (1997) says that, like community-based media, initiators of social media accounts may overestimate the need for people to express themselves via the media. While this idea is unpopular to the idea that social media is the answer to online community interaction, such considerations could contribute to the overall utility of the mediums.

Summary: Interpreting Organizational Social Spaces

Earlier in this review of literature, I have discussed that I will approach CUIIM *as* cultural as opposed to *doing* culture for the purposes of this study. This theoretical lens is inherently interpretive by referring to the nature of organizations as being created and manifested through meaningful structures. Therefore, I will consider social media as a cultural medium and analyzing social media as being a part of intramural culture. Such a

position lends itself to study culture as a metaphor that guides organizational meaning the ways in which an organization manifests itself through text in social media.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

To capture subjective interpretations of the UIM organization in this case study, I used one primary method using in-depth, semi-structured interviews and a collection of UIM organizational text as secondary evidentiary support. I consulted with Craig and Tracy's (1993) grounded practical theory and their problem-centered model. Pairing grounded practical theory with an interpretive paradigm lent itself to critical inquiry. As a framework, the practical knowledge gained from the interview text was conceptualized for reconstruction of organizational practice. In other words, the culture was looked at as it was established in both UIM sport playing spaces and social media spaces, and then put together to review UIM's efforts in utilizing Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The following research questions guided this study, and I addressed both questions in Chapter Six.

1. What are the (a) philosophical ideals and values, (b) assumed communication problems, and (c) communication techniques with which UIM student employees and sport players experience and use to interact with the organization's members?
2. In what ways does UIM's communication theory differ from the techniques used by UIM student employees and sport players?

Interpretive Paradigm

I took up an interpretive approach to this study to explore the culture of the UIM organization and its adoption of social media spaces. The interpretive paradigm sees

organizations as being formed by social interaction and shared meaning, unique from a functionalist perspective (Cheney, 2000). Deetz (1982) and other interpretive scholars understand interpretation as conceptually perceived, or given meaning to already formed concepts. In this way, Deetz (1982) says both the actor's subjective interpretations and the phenomena being studied must be made conceptualized and made meaningful in order to adequately understand organizational culture. Thus, the job of an interpretive researcher is to position perception as taking concepts already inherent in organizations, or the larger society as a whole, and allowing them to be seen in a particular way. This institutionalization of knowledge provides meaning for specific phenomena of organizational activities.

This way of seeing organizational culture lends itself well to analyzing social media presence where (1) organizational actors use text to create meaning with each other, and (2) the space itself is textually organized. In *Interpretation of Culture*, Geertz (1973) said, "The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles," suggesting that organizations be studied intertextually and intersubjectively (Deetz, 1982). In the case of social media, these spaces are created through subjective agents within the organization and it is the text produced by the agents that interplay to organize people. I will interpretively pursue an understanding of the organization's culture and is use of social presence via the way participants interpret the text on UIM's social media sites.

Analytic Framework: Grounded Practical Theory

Using Craig and Tracy's (1995) grounded practical theory (GPT) model, I inquired about the practical discipline of communication and the techniques employed for communication to occur within CUIM. There are a few reasons for adopting Craig and Tracy's (1995) GPT framework in this case study. First, the model is intended for studies of situated discourse. Second, it offers the opportunity for reconstruction in communication practice by examining the relationship between practical communication theory and the praxis of communication. This methodology views communication as a social practice and a skilled productive activity by the use of technologies and it is within this intersection that the data lies. To understand this, a brief explanation of GPT's origins will bring light on the importance of normative theories.

Craig and Tracy (1995) developed GPT based on the ideal that, "communication theories that have implications for practice can be 'normative' in the sense that they proved a reasoned basis for deliberating about, or critically evaluating, particular communicative acts," (p. 248). A normative approach to communication does not seek scientific explanation of what phenomena should be in a general sense, but rather it seeks ideals that guide the practice of communicating. Thus, normative theories address actual situated discourse and the praxis of communication. Together, " 'theory (conceptual thought) and 'practice' (situated action)", guide the practical usefulness of GPT to critically analyze and reconstruct dialogic acts (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 252).

Craig and Tracy (1995) contend that practice of communication can be reconstructed at three levels: the technical level, the problem level, and the philosophical

level. For the purposes of this study, I am most interested not only how CUIM uses social media as a communication strategy or technique, but also the philosophical experience behind CUIM adapting to public online social spaces. What I mean by this is, perhaps, their ideals of what social presence means to their organization and how they pursue that space as a communicative medium. By focusing here, interpretive accounts provide, “philosophical reflection in order to find good reasons to warrant using one technique rather than another in a problematic situation,” (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 254). Identifying these ideals is essential to the reflective and reconstruction process toward social change.

Data Gathering Techniques

I utilize one primary data gathering technique in this study, qualitative one-on-one interviews. Organizational texts were not used in this study because it was designed to interpret the audience’s perspective on UIM’s social media accounts, modes of communicating in the organization, and how they experience intramural sport culture. Because this case study does not seek truth in how UIM communicates within the organization, text from the social media accounts was not needed to prove subjective accounts from the interviewees.

Interviews. I will primarily use subjective accounts from members within the organization. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), “Conversation is the basic mode of communication,” and interviews help interpretive communication researchers analyze the taken-for-granted acts of discourse that shape organizations (p. 5). Conversations, when inquiring about culture, are where inside knowledge of a group

becomes unearthed for those outside. Craig and Tracy's (1995) GPT model lends itself well to subjective inquiry because, they report:

“A working assumption of our model is that communication problems typically arise because communicators pursue multiple, competing goals or purposes such that conflicts among goals often emerge to block ongoing discourse and require reflective thinking,” (p. 254).

Subjective inquiry into culture as organizational members described it highlighted the various and differing goals that shape culture in the varying ways they play a part of UIM.

This study sought a cultural perspective of intramural sports and a practical perspective on social media, developed through interviews of those within the CUIM organization. Interviews can provide data about information that cannot be observed by another means and may be used to, “verify, validate, or comment on information obtained from other sources,” (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011, p. 175). Generally speaking, the purpose of utilizing respondent interview in this study is to determine why members within an organization acts in a certain way and interpret their motivations to do so.

Recruitment and interviewing procedures. I conducted 10 interviews with student UIM players and employees within the intramural sport organization. To gather my sample of participants, I sent an inquiry message via email through the UIM listserv of sport participants and employees requesting their participation. I also sent follow-up emails for those who expressed interest, which became my main method of recruitment. Both ways of contacting participants included an IRB approved letter of consent, assuring

the participants of their confidentiality in this case study (Appendix A). Based on the responses I received, I randomly selected interview participants and scheduled face-to-face interviews.

In the study, there were nine participants who were both UIM sport players and employees and one participant who was a sport player only. While this sport player had never worked for the UIM organization, I decided to include this interview because this particular participant sought me out to participate in the study and this perspective was congruent with much of the other findings. There were six men and four women, all ranging between the ages of 19 and 25. Three of the interviewees were juniors, five were seniors, and two were first year graduate students. The interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. They were moderately structured by a flexible interview guide and conducted in a neutral place that the participants chose. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

The interview guide was structured around three things: impressions of the UIM organizational culture, ideals and practices of social media, social media use in UIM, and communication problems. While conducting the interviews, I followed the same interview guide and did not make changes to the questions or the structure of the guide. There were some questions, however, that most participants needed elaboration on. For example, question 2B in Appendix B, asks, “How would you characterize the culture of UIM?” Participants had trouble understanding this question so I helped to clarify by saying, “What is a person’s experience in the UIM environment?” and there were able to characterize what the environment was like, and thus paint a picture of its cultural

components. I often digressed from the script to inquire about a participant's particular response, but then returned back to the script.

Data Analysis: Qualitative Coding

Interpretive discourse analysis of subjective actors yields insights to communication problems experienced by organizations, techniques used to address these issues, and the ideas that guide those techniques (Craig & Tracy, 1995). I applied the three-level framework of GPT to both the normative responses (i.e. organizational members). Using open coding and in vivo coding procedures (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Miles and Huberman 1994), I identified categories within and across the data for themes and initial identification of techniques, problems, and ideals. These codes were maintained in a continuously revised codebook. After in vivo coding, I organized the data within the three levels of the problem-centered model for grounded practical theory: the technical level, the problem level, and the philosophical level (Craig & Tracy, 1995). Throughout analysis and my demonstration of the data, I will apply the constant comparative method as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to allow the data to form the argument.

Problem-Centered Model for Grounded Practical Theory

I consulted with Craig and Tracy's (1995) grounded practical theory while analyzing the results in this case study. Different from but influenced by Glaser and Strauss (1976) grounded theory strategy, "The essential purpose of grounded practical theory is not to explain and predict behavior, but rather to provide reasoned normative models—rational reconstructions—to inform praxis and critique," (Craig & Tracy, 1995,

p. 265). The authors explain that, “practice can be reconstructed at three interrelated theoretical-levels,” (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 265): the technical level (i.e., communicative strategies and techniques), the problem level (i.e., communication problems and dilemmas), and the philosophical level (i.e., situated ideals, values, beliefs) (Lyon & Mirivel, 2011, p. 59). The benefit to using the problem-centered model for interpretive inquiry will allow for practical critique.

The technical level. According to Craig and Tracy (1995), “At the most concrete level, a practices can be reconstructed as a repertory of specific communicative strategies and techniques that are routinely available to be employed within the practice,” (p. 253). Put more simply, members within an organization perform certain communicative strategies and techniques that are specific to the interworking of the organization. These are the tangible, existing communication practices that are looked at while analyzing the data. For example, in this case study, UIM’s use of Facebook and Twitter will first be considered during analysis. Both of these communication tools are used in specific ways in the organization, which were described by the participants, and will be practical to consider when making connections between the practices of using social media tools and the theoretical assumptions attached to them.

The problem level. Naturally, problems and dilemmas are typically associated with any sort of communication technique. Craig and Tracy (1995) recognize techniques are put in place as a response to these problems and dilemmas that practitioners recognize.

Hence, at a second level, a practice can be reconstructed as a problem logic or interrelated web of problems that practitioners experience and that bring forth both normative reflection (at the philosophical level) as well as strategic action (at the technical level) (Craig and Tracy, 1995, p. 253).

The purpose of this level is to acknowledge the problems associated with the particular techniques and deconstruct them at their most basic function. This will come into play while analyzing the particular efforts that UIM uses to communicate with the student members in the organization.

The philosophical level. One of the ways to solve problems is to take a step back and look at the big picture. Craig and Tracy (1995) utilize this level to return back to the ideals associated with the communication technique being used in order to, “provide a rationale for the resolution of problems,” (p. 253). Specifically:

In reflecting on what to do about a problem, alternative “situated ideals” may be available from which to derive reasons for resolving the problem in one way or another, accepting certain trade-offs among competing goals, and thus choosing to use certain communicative strategies and techniques rather than others. A practices can thus be reconstructed by articulating situated ideas as explicit philosophical positions (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 253).

Competing goals is often inevitable in organizations when making changes, particularly with communication tools such as software or, in this case, social media tools. What will be particularly useful is to analyze the ways in which the participants describe their use of social media and the ideals associated with them. Then, in comparison, deconstructing

the ideals that UIM has attributed to adopting Facebook and Twitter to connect with their student employees and sport players.’

Summary

In this chapter, I have explicated how I will conduct a case study of UIM culture and their recent adoption of social media accounts. By using an interpretive paradigm, I will allow subjective experience from participants to drive the research. While I consulted with the social media pages prior to beginning this study, my primary data will come from one-on-one qualitative interviews to explain the organizational texts used in UIM. In the next few chapters, I will present the data and then, in Chapter Six, I will use Craig and Tracy’s (1995) GPT to reconstruct UIM’s practical theory of communication on three levels: the philosophical level, the problem level, and the technical level.

CHAPTER FOUR

UIM AS A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

In this chapter, I use the UIM participant's experiences to analyze the culture of UIM and how it is discursively formed. The ten interviewees, who play both the role of student employees and sport players, have painted a picture of what it is like to be a part of the UIM organization. Common themes about the UIM culture emerged and patterns of these characterizations helped me to center UIM as a cultural experience for the students, one that plays an important part of their college experience. From the questions, I was able to attain responses that highlighted the contributions of UIM to student life, and ways in which organizational structure contribute to the social space.

Through the combination of participating in and representing UIM, the UIM student employees act as the face of the organization and shape sport player's intramural cultural experience. They are the points of contact, keepers of information, and the subject matter experts. Therefore, the UIM culture is shaped from what is communicated by the student employees, and is trickled down to the student UIM sport players. Cheney, et al (2011) reminds us that communication shapes an organization's culture, and therefore an organization's culture is experience through communication. This chapter doesn't treat UIM culture as problematic, but rather how culture is experienced and understood. By taking a look at the social conventions of UIM, it is clear that the student employees are indeed the social bond, or the "glue", that holds the UIM community together (Cheney, et al, 2011, p. 80).

Before I begin to demonstrate the data, I will review the unique makeup of UIM. It is both student-led and student-driven. From the top-down, the structure of UIM starts with a full-time director in the recreation department of the college, followed by a graduate assistant, then undergraduate student supervisors, lastly followed by student sport officials. The supervisors manage the sport officials, and both positions manage the student sport players during sport activities held primarily in the evenings. This may not seem much different from other organizations on college campuses; however, managing sport activities can be very dynamic. Various levels of competition, injury liability risks, and specific sport rulings add several levels of dimension when talking about peer-to-peer management. This information will be important in this chapter while characterizing the culture of UIM.

The relevance of this chapter is a two-fold answer. First, from an interpretive standpoint, it is necessary to see the different associations and interest levels the participants have with UIM. Each of the interviewees, with the exception of one, sought out employment with the organization. Involvement with the organization is free and open to all students on campus, so participating in UIM demonstrates sport-related enthusiasm and commitment to being a part of a team. In this case, there are multiple “teams” at play: the supervisory team, the sport official teams, and the sport teams. Explained by Palmer, a supervisor, sport official and sport player:

“You’re kind of in a unique position, where you want to play with your peers, and you also work with your peers, and you also supervise your peers. It becomes

a fine line because to some person you're a friend, to another person you're just an official, to another person you're their boss. Everybody takes that differently.” Each team has their own set of motivations and membership within the organization, which requires different ways of communicating with or within that team. With all of this in mind, the interviewee's expressed how being a part of the organization has impacted their social bonds with their respective teams within UIM.

Second, UIM student employees are constantly playing an informational and problem-solving role to the sport players. In this way, interviewees treated student employees *as the people primarily responsible for shaping* UIM culture and participants' experience. The officials are looked at to be able to demonstrate their sport-rule knowledge while teams are competing, and have a unique role in managing sport players when competitive emotions run high on the fields or courts. Supervisors, the students who manage the sport officials and the sport players, are the highest level of management during sport activities and the glue that bonds the organization. They handle the administrative duties such as the schedule, signing players into the game sheets, filling out injury reports and incident reports, and any other paperwork that deals directly with sport competitions. Additionally, they are held primarily responsible to resolve sport rule-related conflict during games, handle behavioral incidents in the sport playing spaces, administer first-aid to injuries which includes emergency situations, and make decisions that directly relate to the overall mission and rules of the organization. Together, the sport officials and supervisors are the center of the organization and play an integral part of its success or failing.

The data in this chapter was gained from the first and second sections of questions (see Appendix B). These questions were related to, first, what role UIM plays in their life as student employees and student sport players, and, second, what sorts of things characterize the organizational culture of UIM. For some questions, the interviewees were asked to answer as both as employees and as sport players (i.e., what is it like to participate with UIM; what is it like to work in UIM?). In the next couple of sections, I will demonstrate the interviewee's interpretations in several relevant themes: How UIM impacts the student employees and sport players, how the student employees shape the UIM culture, and the role of agency in the UIM organization as a result of the mutual influences. I will conclude the chapter with how this applies to theory discussed in the literature review.

How UIM Impacts the Student Employees and Sport Players

A true learning environment, this collegiate organization contributes to the developmental growth of the students who were either employed by, and/or, sport participants for UIM. This section will be dedicated to examples of how UIM, according to Laurie, "played a big role" in the interviewee's lives and how having multiples roles in the organization plays out in contributing to the culture of UIM. Matt, a graduate student who has played and worked for intramurals for six years in college, said, "I don't miss games due to injury or class or anything. It's been really important. I really couldn't imagine my college career without it, to be honest." Each interviewee had a similar response alluding to social gains and more personal developmental gains. They reported a list of ways that the organization has helped them personally in college and, in many

ways, will help them in life after college. This is an important narrative in this case study when conceptualizing how important the student employees are to the UIM organization.

Social gains: “We’re not just coworkers. We’re friends.” While they are working or playing, this boundary often seems blurred to the interviewees. Most reported that the intramural spaces were both for socializing and working at the same time, while indexing times where they had play one role over the other. In any case, they placed more emphasis on the social gains and less weight on the work component of UIM. First, many reported how UIM helped them gain a social network when first moving to campus. Chandler recalls when he first became a part of UIM, “Getting that email and getting to be a part of intramurals was just really a gateway to me meeting, I would say, the majority of the people that I hang out with now and that I know now.” Similarly, Jeremy reported, “It’s been great to really grow my community of friends through intramurals,” and, “just getting to rub shoulders with your peers is a great thing.” Chandler goes a significant step forward by characterizing UIM as a family. “Being in intramurals has a different culture, maybe like a family environment versus doing your own thing in an individual environment,” said Chandler, “The family environment kind of helps me come out to work and look forward to it.”

Other interviewees characterized their experience by indexing their own subjective position with UIM. As a supervisor, Laurie talked about the benefits she has being an employee versus just an intramural sport participant. “I created friendships and relationships that I don’t think participants always get to form,” said Lauren, indicating how being more involved helps foster those bonds. Jeremy, when talking about how he

interacts with the sport players, said, “I make a new friend almost every week,” by getting to sign in participants before their games all week, every week during a sport season. Chandler indicates the relationships he creates while officiating his peers during sport competitions, “these are guys I might even be hanging out with the next night.”

A few interviewees discussed how UIM is how they spend their social time with friends. Robin said, “It’s a fun way to hang out with friends. Lots of times everybody is so busy. It’s a good way to get a group of people together to see them.” Likewise, Kathryn stated, “It’s like an hour of the day that I can go play sports and hang out with friends.” Two interviewees, Matt and Dana, are graduate students who indicated their experiences in undergraduate versus graduate school. “In undergrad it was a great way to meet a lot of different people,” said Matt, but they explained, “Especially in grad school. We developed a very good camaraderie playing all different types of sports together,” indicating the social gains he formed with his graduate cohort. From these reflections, it is evident the social aspect of UIM is an attraction to being a part of the organization.

Mental and physical benefits. Interviewees reported how being involved with UIM has aided both their physical and mental health while in college. From the physical activity to simply leaving schoolwork behind to focus on something else, the interviewees gave many reasons why they continue to be a part of the organization.

As sport players, the interviewees repeatedly shared how being a part of a team and playing sports on a weekly basis helps to relieve stress from the daily pressures they experience in college. Said best by Jeremy, “Intramurals is a great way to relieve a lot of stress. It takes a lot of pressure off of the strains of life.” Robin agreed, “it’s a good stress

reliever,” along with the majority of the interviewees who said similar things to say. Additionally, Chandler reported that, “It helps me keep a level head,” with a full-time class load and additional commitments in college.

In this example, participation and representation collide when Jeremy discusses how he must uphold the integrity of the organization. While competing in soccer games and being an employee at the same time, Jeremy said UIM “helps me keep control of my temper when a game might be getting out of hand and not going my way.” Furthermore, he said, “It helps me personally, keep a level head and know that if I blow up I could lose my job and I don’t want to do that...I realize that I have the face of intramural as I play.” With multiple reports of relieving stress, keeping mental states level, and controlling emotions, UIM has the potential to make a difference a college student’s development that often struggle with mental endurance, strain, and exhaustion.

Many interviewees also reported how UIM fulfills practical needs by providing income for rent, food and gas. However, even more evident, was how the UIM activities enhance the participant’s physical health. One of the main reasons why most of the interviewees play sports with intramurals is because they were used to playing in high school, or played team sports during their childhood. Like Robin said, “it’s a way to stay competitive and to stay active in college and still be involved in the sports I played in high school.” Similarly, “I think it’s a great way to stay active,” Lauren added, “I know I played sports all in high school and I knew wasn’t going to be playing in college,” because of the competition level that varsity sports demand. “So its nice to be able to continue to play with people who have the same interest.” Dana, also, reported that UIM

is a way for her to stay active. “I train and run, I just trained for a marathon, but it’s nice to do team sports with intramurals, as well.” These experiences speak to a popular narrative, that student’s physical health begins to dwindle in college, but these experiences prove how a campus intramural organization is a culture that provides physical gains for students.

Student development. UIM provides developmental opportunities for the student members. Getting involved in organizations on campus is all a part of the learning opportunities available to students outside of fundamental course work, and intramurals proves to be no exception. Arguably, UIM student employees have responsibilities that exceed those of other social organizations. There is physical labor involved with setting up fields and carrying heavy equipment. The supervisors must have CPR/AED and First Aid training to handle serious injuries while acting as the first respondents (e.g., heat stroke, broken bones, lacerations, and concussions). Sport officials must have proper training in sport-rule knowledge and know procedures for handling unsportsmanlike behavior. All student employees must manage their peers in some way and have to make decisions that have legal liability stipulations. These are important jobs and, thus, afford important developmental outcomes.

There were some variances among the responses, however all interviewees reported at least one way that UIM has helped with in their student development. Among the lessons students learned were time management, responsibility, leadership, and networking. To begin, “I feel like it’s helped me grow as a student because it’s given me something to do other than just school work,” said Kathryn, “Like time management and

put more responsibility on my plate than just school work.” Laurie responded similarly, “I definitely think it keeps my time occupied and helped me develop as a student because of time management skills and making sure I got my work done.” This idea of time management was common and reaffirmed by Matt, an engineering student with what he explained as a tough workload, “It taught me how to balance school and social fun type things.” A few other responses were, perhaps, more personal. Tim, who described himself as more an introvert personality type, said, “I think it has made me a better leader.” Robin also reported, “I’ve gained a lot of self-confidence and some authority. I just grew up as a person.” Lastly, Dana, one of the graduate students, said, “it gives me a good connection to people in my department outside of department activities.” All of these developmental takeaways will be important for the working world in life after college.

UIM was potentially the first time the students had more formal peer-to-peer management experience. Matt’s response captures a unifying attitude for participants who started as sport officials, then were promoted to supervisors:

When I became an official, I kind of knew the rules of the sport, but dealing with my own or people my own age was kind of a rude awakening at the beginning. Then, you know, as you grow into the role and become a little more adept to what’s going on, you can really develop as a person. Not only like as an official, but kind of just how to deal with really tough situations. Then as a supervisor, just working with different people trying to accomplish the same kind of goal is really good life experience.

Chandler agrees, “It helps you talk amongst your peers while officiating...being in charge of other people the same age or older than you.” Coming down on a peer is a difficult situation. Sport officials may have to give a unsportsmanlike conduct penalty to either, 1) someone they have never met, who is their same age or older, or 2) to a peer they sit in front of during Spanish 202. Similarly, supervisors often have to tell a student they can’t play that night because the player broke the rules by not signing in with their university identification card. Mind you, this may be a peer they will have to hold hands with during prayer at the next campus FCA meeting.

On a positive note, Palmer responded from a participant standpoint, “I think it gave me a little more respect for my peers. When I become frustrated with the referees and then when I worked I realized that they were student referees and my ages and...they’re not experts.” In sum, Palmer said:

These are definitely people skills. The way you handle circumstances and situations. There’s always going to be things in life that you’re not going to like. Things may not go your way, but how you handle that and react, it [UIM] teaches you how to deal with that.

All of these things will no doubt help them in their future careers. Student growth is one of the many scopes of college and this campus organization is an opportunity to nurture this growth.

How the Student Employees Shape the UIM Culture

In the same way that UIM has shaped student lives, the UIM employees and sport players shape UIM culture. Robin summed it up best when she characterized the culture

of UIM as being, “fair play and competitive fun.” Across the spectrum, each interviewee used these descriptors to tell what intramurals is all about and how they, as employees, impact UIM. Characterizing the intramural environment can only be done through the interpretations of the UIM participants because they make intramurals a fun, competitive, fair play environment. The employees did this by describing how they are a part of promoting this sort of atmosphere. From reviewing these responses, it is evident that the participants take ownership in their role of creating this space.

Recreational, competitive fun. A balancing act, the interviewees used descriptors to illustrate the sport spaces as fun, competitive, recreational, and other synonyms of the like. Put simply by Palmer, “We’re out there to compete and have fun.” This response was common from all of the participants; each delivered in a slightly different way. “Everyone seems to enjoy themselves and for the most part people are out there for fun, which makes for a good experience,” said Laurie, “I would say it’s usually competitive, but also it’s just for fun.” Like Jeremy said, “I think the culture of intramurals is providing an atmosphere for students and employees to come and not have to worry about, again, the stresses of school as well as get a fun, recreational atmosphere.” This notion to stress relief will be later addressed as a theme in the next chapter. This theme of competition and recreation, together, act as a primary function to a participant’s experience with UIM.

The interviewees expressed how they experience leisure with UIM. Some responses were more unique to personal experience. Dana, a graduate student teacher, shared, “Occasionally our students will play against one of our teams, which is kind of

fun. I think it makes people realize that we're also human, not just teachers, which is nice. We like to have fun, too." Matt, a captain of several sport teams, said, "We took it kind of seriously, but we were having a lot of fun with it, too. So serious, leisure type of stuff." Even more of a personal perspective, "I try to befriend all the officials as well as all the participants so that when they come out, they're going to have a good time while they work and participate. I just try to keep it all fun," said Chandler. Here we learn UIM provides a space for leisure, which is an important theme more explicated in the next chapter.

Some interviewees pointed out the differences in sport leagues and levels of competitive play versus more recreational play, and how those associations paint a picture of differing interests. Preston pointed out, "The vibe is different depending on what league you play in. If you're playing in Old Man's league, the vibe is way more competitive and taken more seriously," and for co-ed games and girls leagues, "people go for just the recreation and fun." By Old Man's league, he explained this was a more competitive league of the many levels teams can choose to sign up with. "I see a lot of guys, especially, come out and I know have played competitively for most of their life and they just don't have that opportunity in colleges...UIM provides that competitive release," said Jeremy. To summarize, the fun, competitive, recreational spirit are all a part of the UIM experience.

Fair play attitude. What makes intramurals unique from being a sandlot league are the rules that are in place, not only to comply with university liability regulations but also to create a cooperative environment. The supervisors and sport officials reported that

their job is to promote an attitude that says, in the words of Palmer, “even if I don’t agree with you, I shouldn’t act that way towards you.” By this, we come to understand that there exists an understanding that compliance and a play-by-the-rules attitude is expected by intramurals and, more importantly, respected by the participants. This is instilled by the managing efforts of the student employees. “Especially being a supervisor, you deal with a lot of disgruntled people and you have to make sure you’re treating people with the same respect and kindness,” says Palmer, “You have to remember that you’re handling situations the right way, not just here, but everywhere else,” Clearly he sees a bigger picture. He continued, “It’s our job to make sure people are safe, and that people aren’t saying derogatory things to one another.” Put differently, what Tim said about UIM was particularly informative. “[UIM] doesn’t take crap from anybody,” he said, and when I asked him to elaborate, “There are set rules and everybody knows them and follows them. The consequences are clearly defined.” Here we see different interpretations of rule following for different scopes of purpose. One, it is socially defined as “the right thing to do”. Two, it is regulated to promote good sportsmanship. Three, it is there for safety. Ultimately, while the participants communicate their responsibility towards the rules, they also express how this is instilling a supportive environment.

Student employees use communication techniques, or functions, to help maintain fair play. Specifically relating to sport play, Chandler said:

That’s what you’re out there for, to keep everything running smoothly on and off the field. You deal with participants who don’t know all the rules before they play

and to provide equipment for them, or to make rulings on the field when officials aren't as experienced in the sport.

In this way, management communicates compliance through their presence of leadership in the sport playing spaces. Jeremy also explained, "There are a lot of things set in place to make sure that this runs smoothly. Like the captain's meetings to make sure at least the captains know all the rules of the game so that once they're all out there its not as hectic." These specific functions are ways the student employees send a message of fair play.

The supervisor-sport official relationship was evident in some responses, too. "The officials sometimes get a little tight when we come around. It's almost like they seek our approval. They want to make sure they're doing a good job. They care," said Palmer, indicating a unique peer-to-peer interaction in UIM. Kathryn talked about how she assists the sport officials, "When things get intense, then I'll step in. I'll say something to calm the participants." All in all, as explained by Tim, "we have to maintain that in-charge role," that contributes to the fair play characteristic of intramurals.

Discussion

In the end, the interviewee's interpretations and their experiences are the most important viewpoints of UIM culture because they are both the participants and the employees who run the organization. Fun, competitive, fair play is discursively formed from the ways in which the employees communicate and interact with sport players on sport activity spaces and holds true that culture is shaped through dialogue in organizational spaces. The culture in this large campus organization is also binding to the university as a whole. In terms of this case study, its important to understand what UIM

culture is like in sport playing spaces before discussing how UIM culture is experienced on new social media spaces, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Here I will end with a discussion of how UIM culture contributes to the overall culture of the university, the role of agency in student employees, and finally some issues of leadership and problems that the participants shared about the UIM organization.

UIM As cultural. What was particularly significant about the student's role with intramurals is how much they care about intramurals. I attribute this to several reasons. First, and simply, they share a love for sports. To be a part of the organization you become part of sports teams, and to work for intramurals you must first officiate before you can be promoted to a supervisor. Laurie summarized this idea best, "I think that [UIM is] meant to promote student involvement on campus. I think that's what the ultimate goal is to get students to come together for a common purpose and while in intramurals is for playing sports, it could be for clubs [on campus] and they are all there for that common purpose as well, it's the same idea." This quote is all encompassing of the next few examples that makes UIM a unique social cultural experience for collegiate students.

Second, they care about their fellow team members, whichever team that may be at the time. They consider everyone on the fields to be their peers, their teammates, their co-worker, and in most cases their friend. Like Chandler said, "I know as a supervisor I try to befriend all the officials as well as all the participants so that when they come out, they're going to have a good time while they work and then they're going to have a good

time while they participant.” It seems easy to care about intramurals by the strength of these bonds.

Lastly, they are all a part of the same university. Being a part of a campus culture makes like-minded people and gives everyone something common to be proud of. Tim said something to this effect while telling me why he became a part of UIM. “[UIM] is a place I can go and be with friends. That’s pretty much all I know at Clemson. I was a freshman trying to integrate myself into the [university] community. It seemed to be a good way to meet new people.” Giving freshman a community to be a part of is important to their success on campus. Even while competing, Palmer pointed out an important take-away, “They’re [sport players] enemies on the field but, in the grand scheme of things, we’re all Vikings¹. Essentially, we’re all on the same team.”

This speaks to the idea of how social structures are formed and held together by, “attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, motivations, habits, and expectations of human beings,” (Katz and Kahn, 1978, p. 37). UIM as a social structure held together by those bonds amongst the student employees and sport players alike, the participants reify that fixed bounds are built by the social aspects and, thus, shape the UIM culture. They conceptualize their membership by the people within the organization, not necessarily contrived and socially driven.

Agency. An important theme that has revealed itself in the data is the role of agency the student members feel for intramurals. They feel a sense of responsibility to anything to do with the sport-related qualities or the physical space. It is socially

¹ The original mascot described was removed to keep the university’s identity confidential and replaced with Vikings.

the culture of UIM, not just because it's a paycheck or a commitment to play for a sport's teams, but also because the success of intramurals rests on their shoulders. Their "it's my job" attitude promotes a true service-oriented environment, and their "it's meaningful to me, therefore I make it meaningful to others" attitude promotes a approachable environment. Like Laurie said:

That's the responsibility you take as a supervisor. As a supervisor you are there to aid all of this. To make sure it's the best possible thing for the participants and I know when I go out there I want people to have fun because that is the purpose of it, so you kind of do whatever you can to make sure it goes smoothly. Smoothly for officials and smoothly for participants so that way everyone is enjoying their time. The nights people don't enjoy their time is always really frustrating.

Palmer agrees, "For the most part, we have the best interests of everyone in mind. We want everybody to have fun. That's why we're out there."

Being a servant to the participants was something that Tim also expressed. "The participants can almost be viewed as customers and you would want to make sure that everything runs smoothly for them," said Tim. Parker illustrated this with a metaphor:

Just like the restaurant business where once you actually become a waiter or waitress, after that you will tip more just like because you understand that side of the business. Since I've been involved with the intramural program I feel like I've become more thankful for what they're doing so that we can have recreation.

While Sewell (1999) says cultures can be loosely integrated, and Brunsson (1985) adds that difficulties in organizations come from recognizing that people in them have many reasons and different interests and goals. UIM proves once again to be unique in that the participants in this study found common ground in that they wish to be a part of the reason why UIM is one of the most popular organizations on campus, and ranked the best amongst other colleges and universities (“Princeton Review, College Rankings,” 2013).

Leadership changes and differing ideals. Before beginning the next chapter, it is important to note references made to leadership changes in UIM. While I have presented the interviewee’s experience of intramural culture to be unproblematic, many of the interviewee’s were referring to their total years of experience with UIM but indexed this past year as less ideal. They indicated there was change in leadership at the director and graduate assistant level, who came with new attitudes, beliefs, and values that affected the attitude of student employees. Because of this, Chandler said, “now it’s a little more divided than in the past,” referring to the cohesion of the staff. Preston points out how culture transcends through the levels of UIM. “The culture, I feel like, transcends and it’s like a totem pole. So it starts at the top with the people and then it trickles down so if [the supervisors] are very straight edged and serious, then that’s going to get to the referees, which is going to go to the teams.” It is understood how one can affect the other, and based on the responses, the change in leadership has effected the employees. Tim reported:

Personally, for me, it’s been a great experience [working for UIM]. However, it’s kind of taken a turn for the worse as pretty much anybody would tell you. Last

year, we lost our director to another position and this new director hasn't really kept up with standards the same way the former director did. It's definitely made for a lot more work.

From his reflection, a change in leadership affected a change in formally perceived standards of UIM and that has played a role in employee experience. Kathryn's attitude towards work currently is much different now as opposed to her previous years with UIM. "It's a job. It's – I don't know, it's just a job to me," said Kathryn, "Not in the past, but now it is...I enjoyed going to work and I enjoyed our weekly meetings being around everybody. And I feel like there was more camaraderie [then] than there is now." These changes are more specific to behavior and attitude from the leaderships. In the next chapter, I present data about new leaderships ideals for adopting social media and how the participants interpret this change in communication techniques.

Summary

I have presented data that contributes to the notion of UIM as a cultural experience. This data serves to say that UIM employees use participation and representation to own an attitude that says, "I have the face of intramurals as I play." The culture is organized by the communication techniques employees use to condition it, such as physical presence and a service-oriented demeanor. The face of intramurals, the employees, shapes and creates the experiences for others. These conclusions will transition into the next chapter where I integrate what was learned about UIM culture and how that plays a part in social media as a technique for communicating culture and social space within UIM.

CHAPTER FIVE

UIM ONLINE PRESENCE

In this chapter, I analyze the participant's interpretations of UIM using social media accounts as organizational communication mediums. I asked the interviewees' questions related to online social presence and their thoughts towards UIM using a Facebook and Twitter account to interface with the organization's members online (see Appendix 1). Their responses explained UIM's communication techniques used in the past compared to the present, meaning post adoption of Facebook and Twitter. Themes emerged that showed a distinction between the ideals of social media capabilities versus the ways in which these efforts are being received by the employees and sport players alike. In the last chapter, I demonstrated how the UIM employees and sport players communication the culture of UIM by both representing and participating in intramural sports. This chapter will prove a distinction between the spaces of intramurals and the ways in which communication techniques impact the organization.

A disconnect emerged in the data between organization online presence ideals and the practice of creating and maintaining these social media spaces. While UIM Facebook and Twitter were reported to be sources of information, UIM's attempt to penetrate sport player's social space on Facebook and Twitter did not communicate the same social experience as being in the intramural sport playing spaces. Being physically located in UIM's virtual world (Biocca 1997) carries no feeling of being socially present, or the feeling of being together with UIM online.

I will address several bodies of literature I consulted with in Chapter Two. As mentioned in Chapter Two, I do not wish to present Facebook and Twitter as “new” phenomena. Instead, I focus on how they have become management’s fashionable way for intramurals to engage in more interpersonal communication with their members already located within these online social media spaces. A key cultural concept of technology is that of social space (Grossberg, 1993), and because culture and technology are contingent agents “the social in this approach is inherently and predominately spatial; the spatial dimensions of technology are social” (Slack & Wise, 2006, p. 153). I will use this lens to look at how UIM attempts to enter the participant’s interpersonal spaces on Facebook and Twitter.

According to Treem and Leonardi’s (2012), “social media affordances may alter socialization, knowledge sharing, and power processes in organizations,” (p. 144). Likewise, Wellman (1997) said it’s likely initiators of community-based media may overestimate the need for people to express themselves via media. In this way, challenging the ideals of social media may not be the most popular narrative, but we will see in the data that not all technological development means progress (Slack and Wise, 2006) and pressures to adopt technological progress narrative may have negative, impersonal effects on organizations (McMillan and Hyde, 2000). Furthermore, we will see how leadership decisions to implement change to UIM communication techniques have spatial consequences on socialization from democratizing its uses (Slack and Wise, 2006), and can cause ambiguity, inconsistency, or confusion compromising the bonds of the social culture (Meyerson and Martin, 1987). I will use these concepts as a way of

looking at the participant's ideals of social media and how social media as a technique has impacted their perception of UIM culture.

I demonstrate this data by first explicating UIM social spaces based on how UIM participants use intramural sport as an escape, how UIM penetrates social boundaries via Facebook and Twitter, and the interviewee's lack of need for organizational social media. Second, I will present the interviewee's thought of social media as a progressive, ideal communication technique to use within intramural sports, followed by challenges to these ideals due to leadership access barriers and the interviewee's tendency to favor "old school" mediums. Last, I'll finish with a discussion that will lead into the next chapter's analysis using Craig & Tracy's (1995) grounded practical theory to reconstruct UIM practical theory of communication.

Social Spaces Explicated

Two UIM spaces will be looked at in this section: the space where intramural sport activities are held, and the social media spaces online. In the previous chapter, I introduced how UIM spaces were considered stress-relievers and a way for students to get away from school. I will expand that here about how UIM participant's feel they are escaping to a carefree space while playing intramural sports. After that, I will show how UIM attempts to penetrate online social media spaces (i.e. Facebook) where they perceive "everyone" to be. These themes of spatial practice will be important to juxtapose how the participants compartmentalize how they use different spaces in their lives for different purposes.

Escapism. Interviewee's made notion to the idea of using intramural sports as an escape from schoolwork and find participating with UIM as a retreat. On a university campus, the majority of the student's time is spent in classrooms, doing homework, meeting with groups for school projects, etc. Coursework often dictates how their time is spent and is often considered priority over extracurricular activities in order to meet the requirements for graduation. Laurie says, "[UIM] is a competitive outlet for people and they see it as a relief. It's a stress reducer, a break from class, and a break from school." Tim synonymously described this outlet as a refuge. "It's kind of a refuge from actual school work and all the other activities that I do." More interestingly, Preston uses UIM as a way to disconnect. "It's also just a good way to kind of disconnect from the academic side." This idea of disconnecting, a popular media term, creates an tension when an organization is attempting to connect with them on Facebook and Twitter.

Penetrating social spaces: where "everyone" is. Similar to the Princeton Review category "everyone plays intramural sports," the popular perception of social media is that everyone uses it. Preston agrees, "everything is moving towards social media." Based on the data, it is assumed that everyone has a personal Facebook account and many have a Twitter account. Like popular discourse tells us, the interviewees agree organizations that adopt social media accounts are following the trend by entering online spaces that are highly populated. When first learning that UIM will be using Facebook, Jeremy said, "My initial reaction was like I think this can be a good tool for intramurals—like everybody is on Facebook." Similarly, Matt agrees, "So many people rely on Facebook and Twitter and it's something people already use anyway, so you

might as well join with the trend that is already happening to try to benefit your organization.”

The interviewee’s described the popular demographics that favor social media and why a campus organization fits the mold. “It’s just another one of those things that you’ve got to have to appeal to your demographic,” said Palmer, “And our demographic [college students] completely supports the use of social media applications.” Laurie reminds us that it’s “mostly young people” who often use these mediums, and Tim concurs, “I don’t know any college student who doesn’t have a social media account.” The interviewees agree that everyone uses social media, social media is popular among college students especially, and overall it was a smart move for UIM to join the trend.

Their responses indicate how UIM is attempting to penetrate the bounds of UIM member’s social spaces using their newly adopted social media accounts. While its not a part of this case study to specifically inquire as to why UIM is using social media, the participants did share their feelings towards the social media accounts. In addition to UIM sport activity spaces, the interviewees believe UIM adopted them as an additional space for advertising, information sharing, and socializing. However, in the following data it’s clear that UIM Facebook and Twitter in practice doesn’t resonate with the UIM student employees.

It’s for them, but not me. The overarching attitude toward UIM Facebook and Twitters account is that it hypothetically can be a great tool for the sport players, but not for the interviewees. Keeping in mind they are also sport players, its likely that this ideal is shared by others as well. Recalling how the interviewees use UIM as a way to

disconnect from coursework, and believe everyone uses social media, it would be a fair to assume that the interviewees would be knowledgeable about UIM social media activity. But based on the responses, I've found that the participants didn't really know of any recent UIM social media activity. Jeremy, who expressed enthusiasm about UIM's social media adoption and an avid Facebook user, said, "I honestly haven't really been going through the UIM Facebook page, myself. I just kind of know it's out there and I'll occasionally get some information on my personal newsfeed or some kind of an update." When asked if they have had any recent activity on UIM's Facebook or Twitter account, Kathryn, Laurie, Tim, and Palmer all reported that they have all but never posted, tweeted, commented, or provided any contributions to these spaces. Even more surprising, Dana replied, "I didn't even know we had Facebook or Twitter." The overall attitude was that the social media pages were for "others" to use, but not necessarily the interviewees, revealing that ideals do not match the practicality of the accounts. Laurie says she "[doesn't] have any use for it." Here we learn the primary communicators of the organization are virtually absent from UIM Facebook and Twitter.

Ideals of Social Media

We've established the common perception that social media is used by everyone and is now common practice in society. The interviewees have ideals for ways in which social media has the potential to change the way UIM communicates with the organization. First I'll address the progressive narrative that social media is revolutionary, new, and has the potential to make communication better. They believe social media has specific functions that can be used to change, and better, the way in

which UIM gets their information “out there”. This is the second theme I’ll address. “Out there” is a phrase that emerges throughout the data and is referring to the need for the organization to get information somewhere in arbitrary space where UIM participants will receive the message. The question then becomes, what is “out there”? Who is the receiver? Even if there is a receiver, is the message being received?

A progressive statement. There’s a consensus among the responses that UIM using social media can make communication better within the organization, if used in ways that the interviewee’s describe. I argue these statements were made in theory as ideals the interviewees have for UIM utilizing social media but not realistic in practice. The majority of the interviewees enthusiastically agree that social media in intramurals can be a good communication technique, if used in a particular way according to the respondent. A demonstration of the responses will show this ideal-type discourse and the interviewee’s input on how it should be used.

Many responses reported that social media can do three things: reach a large majority of people quickly, reduce the number of phone calls or emails due to mass messaging, and can provide a space for interaction among the users. As Jeremy explains, “you can put stuff on Facebook and, almost instantaneously, hundreds of people can see it.” Furthermore, he explains, “So I think those organizations are being smart in utilizing the social media because I mean there’s large businesses and fortune 500 companies that utilize social media and are really just able to work smarter not harder.” Matt agrees that intramural updates on Facebook and Twitter can be “a more efficient way that helps participants” as opposed to phone calls or emails. Palmer explains that it can be used to

post sport-related stuff like quizzes or jokes, and Dana agrees that it could be used to post updates from CBS sports to show they are “up-to-date on sport related stuff.” Chandler explains that “If officials need a shift covered, they can just post it to Twitter or Facebook and someone could respond, as opposed to email chains,” yet when asked Chandler reported to never having actually seen this done. There were many examples given on how social media can be used for communicating to the members in the organization, and ideas for ways the members can communicate with themselves on these spaces, but the question then becomes, does it actually happen?

After he explained to me how great it would be if sport players could reschedule games via communicating on Facebook, I asked Jeremy, “have you seen this before?” He replied, “I actually haven’t seen it happen, but I think that would be a great way to be able to use Facebook like that.” After Tim explained that he could start up a dialogue on Twitter asking if games were still on that night in the case of bad weather, he said, “On Twitter, I actually don’t engage in it,” and said he rarely sees UIM Twitter updates. Little by little I started to realize that all of the employees who expressed enthusiasm about social media functions rarely utilized them in the way they described and, even more curiously, rarely visited the sites at all for any purpose. Even Laurie, who described it as a “good business strategy” reported to rarely checking UIM Facebook or Twitter. “I think they do a good job of posting pictures and questions and updates and stuff,” said Laurie, “Other than receive updates, I don’t post or say anything on there.” When asked if she would post to UIM’s Facebook or Twitter, Dana replied no and said, “I don’t have any reason to.”

Most interviewees answered the same way, that they didn't have any need or reason to post or react or say anything on the social media accounts, and that any UIM update just swam through their newsfeeds. Surprisingly, some participants even reported that it might be considered "uncool" to say anything on UIM's Facebook or Twitter or that they might be "ridiculed," according to Matt, for speaking out. In any case, this seemingly progressive and ideally useful tool is lacking much action from the UIM participants interviewed in this study.

Getting information "out there." The interviewees continuously say UIM needs to get information "out there." Because it was such a common response, I looked further into interpreting what they meant by this dispersion of information. There seemed to be a lack of personal agency for the participants when it came to message management on communication technologies, and more ownership of message delivery when it came to providing information via word of mouth. The information that the participants felt needed to be delivered "out there" included from sport sign-up dates and details, to sport official recruiting and training information, to weather updates, to championship reports, to any additional advertising that would increase membership. Lauren, who felt there was a lack of information UIM information overall, said, "I haven't seen any emails, posters, advertisements, or anything since we began using social media." Dana replied, "If someone had told me that I would need to go to the Facebook and Twitter pages to get information I would have." Tim even said, "I don't think people go on the page and just talk to each other about [UIM] sports stuff."

There seems to be an assumption among the participants that using social media to get message “out there,” meaning public for people to see, that people will actually receive them which is not necessarily the case. The popular discourse that sees social media as everywhere and an efficient source of information forgets to note that while the information gets posted in one seemingly populous space, doesn’t necessarily mean that it has been received. And in this case, efficient communication has not been achieved. After noticing this trend, the interviewees started to back track and challenge their social media ideals and I began to get to the bottom of the problems they have with the new UIM social media usage.

Challenges to Ideals

After hearing the participants talk about how UIM social media is being used technically and their ideals they have for how it can help UIM, I was starting to see why they lack information about the actual UIM Facebook and Twitter activity. First, there are clearly access barriers that keep the student UIM employees at bay when it comes to UIM Facebook and Twitter. When they aren’t involved, the social media spaces aren’t fulfilling a need and create a separation with the social bonds within the organization’s members. Third, the participants prefer using what they refer to as old school ways of communicating, such as flyers, mass email using listservs, and, most importantly, word of mouth.

Access barriers. I found out through the responses that the student supervisors do not have access to update information on the UIM Facebook and Twitter accounts. While they are connected with these accounts and have the ability to post or tweet at UIM, they

cannot act as UIM. Jeremy, Tim, Kathryn, and Chandler all reported that their managers are in control of the accounts. Kathryn gave insight that she doesn't think it's been as successful as "the boss man wants it to be" indicating that this is an initiative of leadership to have these accounts. "I think the fact that only one person has access to it makes the update pool smaller," said Tim, "When someone on Twitter doesn't update very often, you usually just skip over it and forget about it." Jeremy agrees, "When we have just one person in charge of our Facebook account, and he's not at the sports at night, we're not getting as much information out there as we could if multiple supervisors were able to have access and update it quickly." Because of the lack of access, Robin states, "There's lots of stuff that happens [in UIM] that doesn't get posted to Facebook or Twitter."

Laurie, somewhat more encouraging of the efforts, sees the problem with not having the student employees involved. "I think they do a decent job of posting pictures and getting some updates out there, but I think they need to get the core group behind it," she said, "So in intramurals that would be supervisors and officials." During supervisor weekly meetings, Tim reports that the topic of social media just gets "brushed off." "We don't have any control or access to it," he said, "We don't feel direction attached to it, so there's not really a big need to pay attention to it." We learn from this information that not only are the student employees not providing much activity on UIM Facebook and Twitter, they also don't have the ability to share information from UIM to the participants. Because of this, it is clear to see why they may not feel any motivation to advocate for and support the use of these social media spaces. They have no agency or

sense of responsibility to be involved. It comes back to the idea that these communication mediums are not for them, but rather for “others” which creates a separation in the social bonds that have been created in the sport playing spaces. The social bonds are not translating to the online social spaces.

Popular vote for “old school” communication. After expressing their ideals of using social media and issues with using it in UIM, the interviewees gave a popular vote for sticking with, what they consider, old school communication methods. While social media is considered trendier; the interviewees ultimately revert back to methods that have worked in the past. “I think they’ve put too much focus in it. Unless you’re friends with [UIM] intramurals on Facebook, you don’t get any of that information if you don’t follow [UIM] on Twitter, you don’t see anything,” said Laurie, “With the list serve to the campus, everyone see that and you get an email.” Even less optimistic, Kathryn reported, “We had a 20 minute meeting and ten minutes was spent talking about social media. We have other things to actually discuss rather than wasting time talking about Facebook.” To get at the root of these responses, I asked what are the best ways in which UIM can communicate within the organization, and the responses were synonymous.

The three most popular reported way to communicate with UIM members is recruitment flyers and posters around campus, mass email through Clemson list serve, and, perhaps the most popular, face-to-face communication from the student employees down through the student sport players. After that, they agree, social media can be utilized as an afterthought. “Communication, like one-on-one communication, face-to-face,” is what Kathryn believes is the best way to create social bonds and share

information in intramural sports. “You can’t forget that one-on-one interaction.”

Similarly, Jeremy said, “I’ve just been doing things old school. Texting, email, phone calls, just that face-to-face interaction for responses.” Tim talks about the importance of flyers and posters as advertisement. “It was actually posted on the elevator in my dorm and I was like yeah I’ll go and try that.” In fact, all of the interviewees in this study came to intramural after seeing either a poster in their dorms or received a mass email through the student list serve. But by and large, the participants said their role as communicators on campus and on the playing fields was the most important source of information for the UIM members. “I feel like we should be more active on campus and promoting intramurals,” said Robin, “and build a good repertoire with the students to make them want to participate more with [UIM], and then social media [UIM] stuff.” In this way, social media is an afterthought to communication that exists offline.

Summary

I have reviewed responses that pertain to UIM’s use of social media and the participants’ interpretations of the ways in which UIM communicates within the organization. In particular, I have shared the participant’s responses specifically to UIM Facebook and Twitter ideals, and their ideals to other methods of communication. We have looked at the social spaces where UIM interfaces with its members, both the social media and the sport playing spaces, and what kind of communication interaction is actually happening in reality. Based upon these responses, we see that there exists a discrepancy between how messages should be sent, where they should take place, and who should send them. The participants feel less socially presence (i.e. the psychological

feeling of interaction) on UIM's Facebook or Twitter accounts, and most present in the physical spaces of the sport playing fields. The spaces for virtual interaction and collaboration have rather become a place for information dissemination, while the majority of social bonding happens in the spaces where the fundamentals of intramurals take place—the sport playing spaces. Now, it is time to take the information from Chapters Four and Five and reconstruct it into Craig and Tracy's (1995) grounded practical theory in order to offer practical conclusions able to apply to organizational uses of social media accounts.

CHAPTER SIX

UIM'S PRACTICAL THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

In this chapter, I reconstruct UIM's practical theory of communication. I came to this theory by first analyzing the representation of the intramural culture and, second, analyzing social presence within UIM social spaces. The theory was constructed by the interpretations of the interviewees who spoke as student UIM employees and sport participants. This is important to note because the UIM communication techniques, problems, and philosophies are constructed from the interviewee's point of views and not from the organization itself. Their interpretations provided a rich account of communication techniques, problems, and ideals within UIM, and revealed a fragmented view of leadership ideals versus participant ideals. Together, however, the responses conveyed a stance on the importance of representation and ways in which the organization should communicate. Based on the previous two chapters where I presented the data from the interviews, I organize the overall analysis according to Craig and Tracy's (1995) framework to respond to the final research question: *What are the (a) philosophical ideals and values, (b) assumed communication problems, and (c) communication techniques with which UIM student employees and sport players experience and use to interact with the organization's members?*

Craig and Tracy's (1995) GPT order of analysis levels starts with technical, then problem, and finally philosophical. However, in looking at how to approach the order of analysis, Lyon and Mirivel (2011) reverse the order and from that, I agree, there is no

one-size-fits-all approach to this grounded method of analysis. In the context of this case study, idealist cultural perspectives of UIM precede techniques of communication. By extension, I chose to first reconstruct UIM's overall UIM's normative philosophy of communication according to the participant's ideals. Second, I will present communication problems the organization encounters based the employee and sport player perceptions. Third, I will give a basic explanation of the communication techniques and strategies that are used in UIM to address the problems they face, juxtaposing the past and present. Following the analysis, I will conclude by transitioning to Chapter Seven Discussion where I will elaborate on UIM's practical theory of communication and my third research question: *In what ways does UIM's communication theory differ from the techniques used by UIM student employees and sport players?*

UIM's Normative Philosophy of Communication

UIM views good communication as transparent. From the participant's perspective, the organization fosters three normative ideals to guide communication in intramural social spaces. Through their communication, they should (1) provide good customer service to the sport players in dispersing organizational and sport-related information to the sport participants, (2) assume control over their peer's interactions to assure fair and safe play during competitions, and (3) facilitate an enjoyable, social environment for students. Together, these function to make the organizational communication efforts transparent, or obvious, on their ability to provide an enjoyable space for the sport participants

Good customer service. First, a central normative ideal for UIM employees is to

use communication as a way to provide good customer service. In chapter four, Tim and Palmer made very commercial notion to the ways in which they, as employees, interact with sport players referring to serving them as customers of UIM. In a non-commercial climate, this standard of peer-to-peer management fosters an ideal of practicing a golden rule-like standard—treat others the way you want to be treated, so to speak. For example, the participants in this study view themselves as both sport players and sport knowledge experts, who have officiated and supervised for intramurals. In this way, they serve the sport players in a way they want to be served while they are competing in order to foster a fun, competitive and fair play culture. It is very much a give and take attitude. This attitude is evident in a part of the UIM mission statement where it says their mission is to serve the students, faculty and staff, which I will remain undisclosed for confidentiality reasons. Consistently, the interviewee's responses aligned with these goals. They assume one of their many roles is to maintain a pleasant environment where the sport participants want to come back week after week, year after year, to ensure that this organization remains one of the best among colleges and university intramural programs. From a technical standpoint, the participants report they feel a “responsibility” to respond to questions presented on UIM media channels. Good customer service means that two-way communication needs to be evident to the members of the organization.

UIM student employees report how they inform the UIM sport players about organizational information and sport rules. Examples of this information include schedule changes, tournament outcomes, weather-related updates, equipment requirements (i.e. what softball bats are legal), administrative duties for team captains, etc. Aside from face-

to-face communication, sport players are able to communicate with UIM via phone, email, Facebook, Twitter, and through sport league software. Good communication keeps the sport participants well informed and the results are players who adhere to the rules and regularly participate in weekly activities. Also, a reduction in frequent questions relating to the same topic tells UIM that they are being clear in their communication.

In this way, UIM sport players are regarded as customers to the organization and, at the same time, are valued as a peer to the student employees. They are valued as people who make up the organization and without them, not only would the student employees not have a job, they wouldn't have sport participants to compete with. Furthermore, the kindness and support that the UIM employees give to their peers will inevitably translate during interactions outside of UIM activities on campus. Social capital, rather than monetary capital, motivates the student employees to provide customer service through good communication practice.

Assume control. Second, the student employees use communication to assume control over their peer's interactions to assure fair and safe play during competitions. The interviewee's report their job is to make sure that everything runs smoothly on a nightly basis during sporting activities, assist sport players with any issues or injuries that arise, and be a knowledge baseline between sport officials and players. An obvious motivation behind this is to keep their job by adhering to responsibilities, and we can assumed that another motivation is more personal because they themselves participant in intramural sporting activities.

First, this is achieved by making sure the sport officials know the rules of the

game before and during play. The student sport officials pay a social and emotional price for not knowing the rules of the sport when officiating sport players who are at times more knowledgeable about the game. In UIM sport spaces, or on campus, they could easily take criticisms for consistently making bad calls and it can weigh on their social status with their peers. Also, the employees take responsibility to train sport officials and follow the rules they have set for themselves. These rules are posted to the UIM website and are communicated each year to the sport team captains before competition. It is the student employee's responsibility to ensure that the nightly activities are adhering to their own rules.

Additionally, the employees assume a role where they are responsible for health liabilities. They go through First Aid, CPR/AED training and are the first respondents to injured players on the playing spaces. Their communication to the injured participants is key to making decisions on how to treat them. A key to this is proper documentation. They must fill out a medical form to communicate to the UIM administrators what care was given and what referrals were made. Not only is it used for documentation; it is used to contact the participants after the incident and check on their recovering as a courtesy call. Here, again, we see communication strategies undertaken by UIM employees to be of service to UIM participants. All of these values translate into ideally transparent communication in UIM from the organizational communication channels, the documents presented on the website, and through the student employees.

UIM's Assumed Communication Problems

The participants in this case study reinforce assumed UIM philosophical

communication ideals by describing a range of problems and challenges they must overcome. In chapter five, getting information “out there” is reported as a central obstacle UIM faces, meaning getting messages to reach the participants who are dispersed all throughout campus. For this level of analysis, Craig and Tracy (1997) said, “it is the experience of practical problems and dilemmas that requires both the use of communicative strategies and techniques and also philosophical reflection in order to find good reasons to warrant using one technique rather than another,” (p. 254). UIM has to find ways to overcome three communication problems: (1) message retrieval, (2) access barriers, and (3) organizational representation.

Message retrieval. The interviewees reported the organization faces the challenge of getting information “out there” and putting messages in place where a dispersed population of members will receive them. As a reminder, in the 2011-2012 academic school year, UIM employed and managed 69 student staff and approximately 3,700 total participants in the Fall semester, and 101 student staff members and 4,842 student participants in the Spring. With that many staff and participants, message dispersion for the masses is done using strategies, which will be discussed in the next section. The challenge, as reported by the interviewees, is successfully reaching who needs to receive the message and effectively communicating. Also they reported that recruiting for sport officials is a part of that effort. Palmer indicated a time where a UIM advertisement may not have done the message any justice. “Sometimes we use whiteboards in [the recreation center] to advertise we’re doing officials training that night,” said Palmer, “But, I mean, it’s se easy to walk by a board and not see that.” In this

case, it's easy to see how message design and placement can be a concern for recruiting.

By the interviewees continuously saying how they need to get the message “out there,” they need to find the best channels and spaces to send the message. As a review from Chapter Five, communication requires the sender to identify boundaries and pursue those means. We also know from Chapter Five that people compartmentalize their own social spaces and can be selective when deciding what messages permeate and which ones can't. Which brings me to the next challenge, access barriers.

Access barriers. There are two ways in which access barriers pose a challenge for the participants in the role they play as UIM employees and as sport players. First, as outlined in Chapter Five, the participants report that management in UIM has decided to only allow the graduate assistant and the director access to the UIM Facebook and Twitter accounts. While the employees and sport players are free and able to comment, post, tweet, or message UIM, there are not able to act as the organization on the accounts. While this may seem normal for management to control media accounts and not unlike other companies or organizations code of conduct for technology, it has an effect on the way employees feel towards participating in that social space. The interviewees reported they don't feel a part of that UIM social space because they don't have control of it. This leadership decision has had a discouraging effect on the employees, those who have proven through their responses to have control over the climate of intramurals. In addition to feeling discouraged, their responses present an element of apathy in that they know the accounts are there to use but they either don't care to interact on them or they don't think their participation is important. In this way, technology is spatially bias and

choices in mediums have consequences for shaping a particular society, having larger implications over democratizing its uses (Slack & Wise, 2006). The sociality of the medium becomes less fluid and more controlled.

Second, the way in which participants must “friend” or “follow” UIM social media democratizes its uses by controlling the message receiver and makes the technology spatially biased (Slack & Wise, 2006). Participants remind us that only if you are “friends” with or “follow” UIM on Facebook or Twitter can you receive status updates or tweets, or post to or tweet at. Without the working knowledge of these accounts, the messages are irrelevant and lost “out there” in cyberspace. As a reminder, Dana reported that she did not know UIM had Facebook or Twitter. Debunking the myth, that everyone, company, and organization has Facebook or social media of some kind, Dana shows us that this can’t be assumed to be true all of the time. While Dana has a Facebook account, her associations with UIM didn’t come from an online social space, therefore, she didn’t think to pursue them. “I haven’t made it important to add them, and they haven’t told me I needed to add them in order to get updates,” said Dana. Proven in this case, a disparity exists between what is known to be available and what communication mediums people are actually using.

Organizational representation. Communicating as Jeremy said, “what we’re all about,” is another problem that participants work to overcome through communication. This may seem like a rather cumbersome effort, much like selling ice to an Eskimo, but if membership with an organization isn’t worth the time students are willing to sacrifice from their schoolwork then it will ultimately result in failure. Being a part of

organizations on campus repeatedly competes for a student's time and level of dedication. But to Matt, UIM has proven itself to be a priority based on his reported experiences with playing intramural sports. Through any means of communication, the message has to come across that this is a legitimate organization to be a part of and a beneficial way to spend time doing. One indication of concern was when Robin said of UIM's online social media spaces, "Its just another way to advertise and I think people are over it." In this way, representation of UIM on social media spaces may be overlooked or ignored for the simple fact that its lost in a mass flood of advertisement that people aren't paying attention to. Also in regards to social media, "If it's just sitting out there with no updates, it's useless just like anything else that just sits there," Jeremy said, "If we're not using it to its fullest, we're not catching anybody's attention." All in all, making sure to represent UIM in the best ways possible via communication techniques was an important aspect according to the interviewees.

Communication Techniques as a Technology of Transparency

With the UIM communication philosophies and reported problems in mind, the interviewees indicate the communication techniques used by UIM to interact with its members. As stated before, the employees use some techniques and the management control others. Craig and Tracy (1995) explain, "at the most concrete level, a practice can be reconstructed as a repertory of specific communicative strategies and techniques that are routinely available to be employed," (p. 235). As such, these specific techniques are "used to cope with those problems" communicators face (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 25). We can only experience these techniques used by UIM from the interviewee's

responses. This is particularly valuable because we get a good indication of how they perceive these techniques with respect to the reconstruction of UIM's practical theory of communication. UIM participants reported techniques in regards to the social spaces they are utilized within. With that said, UIM attempts to mediate communication via (1) social media (i.e. Facebook and Twitter), (2) student employees face-to-face with sport players, and (3) "old school" methods.

Social media. UIM's recent adopting of Facebook and Twitter laid the groundwork for this case study. It provided a raw opportunity to inquire about how participants perceive UIM using social media as a technology of communication. In Chapter Five I outlined the participant's ideals of social media to potentially benefit UIM. While the participants are unable to provide organizational reasons why the accounts were adopted and specific purposes for organizational use, they were able to identify several ways in which Facebook and Twitter can be and have been used for: weather updates, schedule changes, participatory quizzes, recruiting, and sport player interaction, to name a few. I say this because, as a reminder, there exist a discrepancy between the interviewee's ideals for how social media can make communication better for UIM, and ways in which it has been used thus far.

In Chapter Five I learned that the working knowledge of the UIM Facebook and Twitter accounts is not in abundance because the participants reported to not having had the need or desire to visit the accounts on a consistent basis. What they have reported, however, is that there has been a handful of good feedback from sport players who appreciate the UIM weather updates and posting championship photos. These responses

indicate a level of success in assisting with message retrieval of schedule change updates due to bad weather and organizational representation through photo evidence. But by and large, the interviewees admitted that UIM social media spaces are not on their personal radar and, like Laurie said, “I don’t think that you can portray that [UIM] culture fully online.” Resisting social media usage debunks a popular myth assumed about generations who grew up in the information age, but a powerful response to ideals that social media is capable of forever changing the way people interact and socialize.

Word-of-mouth. By far, the winning technique of choice for the interviewees is, as Chandler states, “just getting out there and talking to the participants [sport players].” Whether it is during UIM sport activity hours, or any other place on campus, interviewees reported how impactful they as a channel has proven to be in UIM sport spaces. This reoccurring theme taken up by all in each interview indicates a strong attraction towards using the sport playing spaces to put a face with a message. More so than simply acting as human bulletin boards, the interviewee’s claimed how the social bonds they form with the sport players opens that line of communication and affords them to be an accessible means of information. This technique is where we get the true meaning of UIM as a transparent organization by way of employee interaction in social spaces where sport activity takes place. They are intimately more connected offline and, once again, debunk popular myths that generations of the informational age lack social skills and revert to posting, tweeting, texting, emailing, or any other forms of socializing online.

Old school methods. Perhaps the most basic, and rather surprising, reported techniques of communication were “old school” methods. The interviewee’s consider

these techniques to be mass emails or flyers or posters. When asked how they first learned about intramural sport officiating jobs and sport sign-ups: five reported to getting a mass email from UIM sent to the student body list serve, one reported to joining after seeing a flyer posted in freshman dorms, campus cafeterias, the recreation center, or any other space on campus with a bulletin board, and three reported to getting both an email and seeing a flyer. Dana said she got involved after seeking information from the UIM website, but she already had working knowledge of intramural sports because she participated at her undergraduate institution. To be fair, UIM did not have social media as a means of recruiting when most of the interviewees joined intramurals, but this example of old school methods shows the impact of other media sources that can often be regarded as a thing of the past. Even with social media, interviewees contend that it's not the only way of reaching students. Laurie tells us, "I haven't gotten any emails from [UIM] since they've gotten Facebook and Twitter." Replacing one medium with another, than has proven to create access barriers in terms of message retrieval, proves to be an ineffective plan for recruiting membership. Most interviewees encouraged UIM's use of a multi-method approach, utilizing the university list serve for mass emails, Facebook, Twitter, flyers, and word-of-mouth in order to effectively communicate throughout the chain of membership. While Preston may be shy in saying, "I'm kind of old school in that I prefer an email from an organization," his feelings are shared by the majority of the participants and again debunk popular myths of new technologies being the most progressive forms of communication.

Summary

In this chapter, I have taken the student employee and sport player interpretations presented in Chapter Four and Chapter Five and reconstructed UIM's practical theory of communication using Craig and Tracy's (1995) GPT's problem-centered model. We see how UIM student employees have a transparent communication philosophy and speak to how UIM communication techniques are used to address problems related to this philosophy. From here, I introduce the third research question: *In what ways does UIM's communication theory differ from the techniques used by UIM student employees and sport players?* In the next chapter, I will use the previous chapters findings and apply them to theory and practice.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

My analysis examined the communication practiced and experienced by UIM participants who play the roles of both student employees and sport players. I have reconstructed UIM's practice model of communication from the interpretations of the organization's employees and sport players to answer the question: *What are the (a) philosophical ideals and values, (b) assumed communication problems, and (c) communication techniques with which UIM student employees and sport players experience and use to interact with the organization's members?* At all three levels, the results indicate that the UIM student employees and participants use a communication approach that creates a transparent image of the organization. The various pieces of UIM's communication structure come together at the same point; they favor the "customers," or the sport players, and value offline communication techniques to maintain social presence in the sport playing spaces.

In this discussion, I will address my third research question: *In what ways does UIM's communication theory differ from the techniques used by UIM student employees and sport players?* I argue that UIM's use of social media, as a communication technique, is not suitable for the student employees and sport players, whose social presence is felt in the sport playing spaces rather than on Facebook or Twitter. Further, I argue that UIM as an organization has largely underestimated the importance of student employee face-to-face communication with organizational members, and their prior use

of what the participants referred to as “old school” methods of communication. By using Facebook and Twitter as a substitute for other techniques, the participant’s responses express concern that these methods will alter the sport player’s perception of UIM’s customer service and, potentially, affect the workings of the organization due to an issue of message retrieval. Perhaps less problematic, but no less relevant, the introduction of social media in UIM has proven to have a neutral affect on UIM’s social presence with the sport players due to the apathy expressed by the student employees, who I have argued to be the face of the organization and greatly impact the social presence felt by the sport players on the sport playing spaces. The transparent communication felt in the sport playing spaces, according to the participants, does not translate to the UIM social media spaces arguably due to a lack of presence of the student employees on UIM’s Facebook and Twitter activity.

In this discussion chapter, I will first use the UIM’s practical theory of transparent communication to draw theoretical implications for social presence, social media, and culture literature. To that end, limitations to the current research and suggestions for future research will be addressed. Second, I will discuss implications for the practical use of this case study for future organizational uses of social media, recommendations for non-commercial organizational use of social media, and future directions for organizational practices leading to online presence.

Implications for Theory

For this case study, I used organizational culture literature from cultural studies and organizational and media literature from communication studies to frame UIM’s use

of social media as a communication technique from the perspectives of its student employees and sport players. From these findings, three areas of scholarship converge to form a conversation with one another within the data. I used a symbolist perspective of social organizations (Cheney et al., 2011) and a paradigm of change in organizational culture (Meyerson & Martin, 1987) to guide my understanding of how participants experienced UIM as a culture. However, the more significant contributions were to cultural conventions of social media (Slack & Wise, 2006; McMillan & Hyde, 2000), social media in organizations (Treem and Leonardi, 2012, 2013; Smith, 2009) and theories of social presence (Short, et al, 1976; Steuer, 1992; Biocca, 2001; Lombard & Ditton, 1997) in regards to technology and social space (Lefebvre, 1991; Slack & Wise, 2006; Hollingshead and Contractor, 2006).

Contributions to theory. Like Jankowski (2006) and Baym (2006) tell us, the newness of media is only a relative notion. Moreover, social media is a socially constructed phenomena, in theory and in practice. In much the same way as the UIM flyers, emails, and face-to-face communication deliver its organizational message, newer platforms like Facebook and Twitter convey the same information albeit from more modern conventions. As theorized by Treem and Leonardi (2012) this case study has shown how, “social media affordances may alter socialization, knowledge sharing, and power processes in organizations,” (p. 144). The choice to utilize social media over other, previously effective, mediums shows that leadership in UIM has misunderstood sociality in the organization, underestimated the power of “old school” mediums for sharing information, and created access barriers to information that threatens the employee’s

ideals of transparent communication within UIM. Unpopular as this argument may be, Facebook or Twitter neither have yet to contribute to the identity of UIM nor strengthened its story and mission, according the student employees and sport players. Treem and Leonardi (2013) point out that, “scholarship has largely failed to explain if and how uses of social media in organizations differ from exiting forms of computer-mediated communication,” (p. 144). This study’s conclusions of organizational culture and social media contribute to their claim that in the case of UIM they differ in sociability and accessibility not only in terms of other CMC forms, but also others considered to be “old school” forms of communication.

For other scholarship that addresses social media and culture, this study contributes to Slack and Wise’s (2006) future suggestions of communication research to discuss the relationships between technologies and culture. Two distinct findings from this study reflect the relationship between technologies and culture. First, technology does not necessarily cause culture change within an organization’s existing social structure. Second, technological adoption does not necessarily mean progress in terms of interaction and message dissemination within organizations. Like McMillan and Hyde (2000) suggestion, the pressure to adopt the technological progress narrative has been a challenging move for UIM from the interpretations of the student employees and sport players. Its uses of Facebook and Twitter have shown to have both a negative effect with regards to message retrieval and accessibility, and a neutral effect in terms of interaction and sociability.

Lastly, Grossberg (1993) contends that a cultural conception of technology is that of social space. From what we know about how leadership technological decisions can impact changes within an organization (Meyerson & Martin, 1987), this case study acts as an example of how control of technological spaces democratizes its uses and the sociality within the medium is thereby more regulated by the leadership rather than by the actual agents of sociality (i.e. the student employees). A lack of understanding from leadership of how the UIM social bonds have formed within an organization, first, overestimated the need for employees and sport players to express themselves via Facebook and Twitter and, second, underestimated the power of social presence that exists in the sport playing fields. In this way, I determined social presence was the degree to which participants felt intimately part of a space. Thus, to add to social presence scholarship, I agree with Steuer (2002) that presence can stand alone in communication research to be applied to various domains of media, but I contend that the social part is important to say that person not only feels present but also intimately connected. In this case study, I found that student employees and sport players felt socially present in the sport playing space rather than in the UIM social media spaces. Social presence in social media research will help to further these same inquiries of social media use in organizations.

Limitations. I used a grounded theory approach to research in the current study. Therefore, limitations to theory can be deducted to extent of scholarship used and will always be considered relative. The limitations in this study can be found in my choice of methodology and decisions on data collection and analysis. First, I chose Craig and

Tracy's (1995) grounded practical theory (GPT) to make both theoretical and practical claims to UIM normative theory of communication. Preceded by Glaser and Strauss (1967) grounded theory method, which laid the foreground for research that is both inductive and deductive that does not aim for truth but rather generation of theory, Craig and Tracy's (1995) GPT takes methodology a step further to offer practical takeaways from theoretical findings. The three levels of analysis approach to GPT, however, could be constricting in that it requires the data to be leveled off into an already determined model: the philosophical level, the problem level, and the technical level. From a user's standpoint, the method could also be misused by the ways in which I, the researcher, interpreted the levels and used them according to interpretation.

Lastly, my decisions on data collection and analysis have limitations in terms of the number of participants interviewed, interview script, and in vivo coding procedures. I chose to interview ten participants and this number could prove to be insufficient for research purposes. However, I was not attempting to reach saturation in terms of number of times something was said, but rather that the data was rich in description of consistent, emergent themes. The interview script was created prior to interviews and remained consistent throughout each interview. However, because I often deviated from the script in order to inquire about a participant's response, I may have lacked continuity in the other data by not asking all the participants the same exact questions throughout the case study. Finally, during open coding and in vivo coding procedures, I worked solo to code the interview transcripts and a one-sided interpretation of the data always presents elements of bias in the research.

Future directions for theory and research. Particularly in media studies scholarship, my findings suggest a need to further inquire about social media usage in organizational communication research. While marketing and advertising research has extensively published about social media as a beneficial marketing tool, inquiry about non-commercial organizational uses of social media are lacking and situate themselves better within communication studies research. As Treem and Leonardi (2013) note, social media usage in organizations is largely lacking. Yet the participants in this study, and popular discourse itself, tells us that “everyone is using social media” in their organizations. This phenomenon provides a raw opportunity to answer Treem and Leonardi (2013) and begin a conversation addressing the need for increased attention on social media’s impact within non-commercial organizational settings.

Additionally, a revised use of social presence in communication research needs to be addressed. If not a revision, but rather a usage of presence in social media spaces could contribute to future studies of how sociability is experienced via social media. While it may not have proven successful or effective for UIM according to the participants in this case study, inquiry into other types of organizations may prove social media to, indeed, improve communication within organizations and add to their social culture.

Implications for Practice

Perhaps the most useful portion of this case study is its potential for practical application. The greatest benefit to using Craig and Tracy’s (1995) GPT approach is that it affords the opportunity to extend theoretical claims and make recommendations for

future practice. This section is for providing tangible, usable claims for organizations looking to adopt new mediums, notice I did not specify social mediums, into their techniques of communication. This extends beyond non-commercialized organizations. Commercialized, non-profit sector, small businesses, fortune 500 companies, etc. are all readily accepting social media as a communication medium for multiple uses. Social media adoption takes time and effort to integrate into an organization's public relations existing strategy. In this way, there needs to exist a necessity and a willing audience for the efforts to be worthwhile, much less gainfully successful. Also, in order to use the mediums based on their social compatibility, organizations should challenge the assumption that social media is simply a "conduit" for information transmission (Putnam & Boys, 2006).

In this section, I will first make recommendations for organizational practice at UIM and other non-commercialized organizations. Next, I will show some limitations for aspects of these techniques I could look more into, or was not able to see using my methodology. Finally, I will provide my thoughts on future directions for what's next in organizational practice.

Recommendations for practice. My first recommendation would be for organizational leader to look deeper into the social bonds that structure the social culture of its organization. There are agents that direct the degree of sociality within the membership population and have a direct influence on the modes with which interaction occurs. To break this claim down, I will use a finding from the research that consistently showed that student employees were not participating on UIM's Facebook and Twitter

accounts often or, in most cases, at all. Because student employees claimed to have a direct impact on the fun, social, and enjoyable aspect of participating intramurals, and an even stronger impact on organizational and sport knowledge, their lack of presence in social media can largely be a cause for its lack of impact on the organization's communication ideals. Leaders should take time to evaluate their own techniques and new technologies in terms of their social culture needs within the organization, rather than relying on the medium alone to make necessary changes. In this way, the popular myth that everything is moving towards using Facebook and/or Twitter, and go where everyone's going to be, is not enough of a supported claim and should be questioned rather than easily adopted.

My last recommendation has less to do with social media usage and more to do with resistance to popular myths that are often easily received as truth. Largely today's generation are regarded as young people incapable of communicating without the use of social technologies, such as text message or social media. Born into a world surrounded by digital media, younger generations are criticized by older generations who are, more or less, fighting against technology and cannot see a youth "whose insitinctual savvy, willingness to experiment, and youthful exuberance draw them to the new technology and the new age it represents," (Mosco, 2004, p. 79). Myths in popular discourse contend that today technology is a substitute for more conventional ways of communicating such as traditional written forms of and face-to-face communication; thus, this generation is largely criticized and reduced to people who lack an understanding of basic socialization

and communication (Klayman, 2012; Conley, 2011; Tate, 2012; Dokoupil, 2012; Debate.org, 2013).

First, I hope to use this research to reject and debunk this popular myth. Second, I believe this case study demonstrates how participants feel their face-to-face communication with sport players is a component of success for the organization, and to the university's campus as a whole. The participants show agency in their ability to socially structure a popular organization and provide an escape route for students who can use competition and recreation to improve physicality and relieve mental strain. Lastly, their choice of flyers in popular spaces, mass email, and social media, all together, shows their intelligence of how to best reach a population of students. In this way, organizations should not underestimate the power of its employees and members nor let social media replace "old school" methods of communication.

Limitations. This case study was designed to examine the interpretations of the participants who were UIM student employees and sport players. I did not provide a textual analysis of the UIM Facebook or Twitter accounts I sought to inquire about. This limitation lacks a true understanding of what is being said on the UIM Facebook and Twitter accounts. Also, nine of the ten participants were both student employees and sport players for UIM, and only one was just a sport player. Of those nine, all were supervisors and sport officials. This limits the true sport player's interpretation of UIM use of social media and also, partly, the true sport official's perspective. Additionally, I did not interview the UIM intramural director or graduate assistant and, therefore, cannot make any claim towards their plans or intentions for adopting Facebook and Twitter

accounts. While these were all choices made to design this interpretive case study, these are limitations that I wish I could look more at or couldn't see due to methodological constraints.

Future directions for organizational practice. I will use this final section to offer my thoughts on what's next for organizations using social media to improve their online presence. First, as I have stated above, knowing the social culture of the organization makes deciding what works in the already existing social bonds much easier. It is important to pay attention to where social presence takes place and decide if introducing an additional social space will add to, be neutral to, or take away from the social interactions that already take place. From the data, several of the participants shared advice on what organizations could do to improve social presence online if adoption social media accounts. It should also be understood that, after adopting social media accounts, the organization must assume they will not get all members to follow or friend the organization for two reasons: one, the members may not know their organization has these accounts, and, two, the members may not use their personal social media space for interacting with their organizations. In regard to the first understanding, use a multi-method plan to advertise via word-of-mouth and in other organizational texts (i.e. shirts, flyers, banners, websites) that the social media accounts exist. Two, the organization can courteously invite their members to join by "friend" requesting or "request" to following, keeping in mind that rejection is a possibility. In any case, social media should not be regarded as a monopolizing method to improving sociability and message dissemination throughout its membership. For social organizations, especially,

online presence is preceded by offline presence and should be treated as such when it comes to communication training for employees and communication techniques.

Summary

I began this case study by first describing UIM, and explaining this case as opportunity to inquire about student employee and sport players' perceptions of the organization adopting and using Facebook and Twitter as a technique of communication. I have reviewed a collection of cultural and communication studies research on organizational culture and communication, and finally on social presence and social media and culture. Next, I presented my methodology using Craig and Tracy's (1995) GPT and data collection strategies based on the interpretive scope of research. Chapter Four presented the data that pertained to the participant's experience with UIM and characterized their role as the face of the organization and how that impacted the social structure of the UIM culture. In Chapter Five, I presented the data that afforded a glance at UIM's two space, on the sport playing space and on social media spaces, and how social presence was felt primarily during sport playing intramural activities. In Chapter Six, I reconstructed UIM's practical theory of communication, from the participant's interpretation of the organization, and showed how they strived for transparent communication in the social culture of UIM and proved disconnect between leadership ideals of communication techniques versus student employee and sport player ideals of communication techniques. Last, in this chapter, I discussed ways this case study contributed to theory and practices, included limitations to theory and practice, and showed future implications for theory and practice of organizational usage of social

media. To conclude, this case study has worked to explore and challenge popular myths and communication ideals about technologies' overhauling or overthrowing of the ways we communicate within organizations. The findings of this study should be beneficial in both scholarly literature and in professional practice for stimulating critical reflection on the cultural intersections of organizational communication and social media.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Consent Form

Information about Being in a Research Study
Clemson University

**“Organizational Communication and the Meanings of Social Media as Cultural Mediums:
A Case Study of Intramural Sport Participants’ Interpretations of Online Presence”**

Description of the Study and Your Part in It

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Madeline Blair and supervised by Principal Investigator Dr. Brenden Kendall at Clemson University. The purpose of this study is to understand intersections between the use of social media and organizational communication. Specifically, we are interested in the facilitation, manifestation, and management of culture within the Clemson University Intramural Sports (CUIS) program as it connects to online presence. As someone involved with the program, your experiences and ideas are of interest to us.

Your participation will involve completing a face-to-face audio-recorded interview. We anticipate that the amount of time required for your participation will be approximately one hour or less. Additionally, we will monitor the “public” pages of CUIS on Twitter and Facebook. The content on Twitter can be seen by anyone, and the content on the Facebook page can be seen by anyone with a Facebook account – these are what we’re calling the “public” pages. If you have posted on or been tagged in either of these social media sites public pages, we may cite or excerpt your activity without using your name or other identifying information.

Risks and Discomforts

The risks involved in this study are minimal. You will be asked to share your experiences with and thoughts about the CUIS, and despite the measures described below for protecting the confidentiality of your responses, there is a small possibility for people to identify you in public presentations of this study.

Possible Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. We are collecting data from the viewpoints of the managerial staff, the student staff, and the participants within the organization, and we hope the findings will assist those adopting social media accounts on behalf of organizations like this one.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. All contact information obtained for participation purposes will be kept confidential and will be destroyed after all data has been transcribed and analyzed. Your name will be replaced with a different name during written transcription of the recorded

This form is valid only if the
Clemson University IRB
stamp of approval is shown here:

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY IRB CONSENT FORM APPROVED <u>10/8/2012</u> EXPIRES <u>10/7/2013</u>

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interviews. In publications that may result from this study, the name of the organization and program will be changed. If you contact us or provide identifying information, your identity will be kept confidential. To maintain confidentiality, only the research project team members will be allowed access to the data. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication that might result from this study.

In reports based on our study, we will remove any identifying information from your interview transcript and any materials we draw from CUIS social media sites. If we use materials from social media sites, we will not ever directly link your interview responses directly to your social media posts.

We might be required to share the information we collect from you with the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance and the federal Office for Human Research Protections. If this happens, the information would only be used to find out if we ran this study properly and protected your rights in the study.

Choosing to Be in the Study

You do not have to be in this study; your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study. You are not required to answer every question. If you wish to skip a question, simply refuse during the interview. You may withdraw from the interview at any time.

We ask you to allow us to interview you and use anything you post to CUIS social media sites. You may also choose to allow us to interview you but ask us not to use material from CUIS social media sites. Please tell the interviewer before the interview if you prefer that we not use social media content that was created by or refers to you.

If you choose to stop taking part in this study, the information you have already provided will be used in a confidential manner.

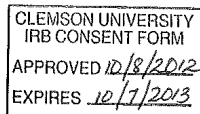
Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact our Principal Investigator, Dr. Brenden Kendall at brendek@clemson.edu or 864-656-5255, or Co-Investigator Madeline Blair at mmblair@clemson.edu or 217-649-5158.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

A copy of this form will be given to you.

This form is valid only if the
Clemson University IRB
stamp of approval is shown here:



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Appendix B

Interview Script

I'd like to begin by briefly discussing your role in Clemson University Intramural Sports (CUIM).

- Please describe your membership with CUIM.
- How did you first get involved with CUIM?
- What is it like to work in CUIM? / What is it like to participate in CUIM programs?
- How does CUIM play a role in your life as a student participant/employee?

Let's focus on organizational culture for a moment.

- The term “culture” means different things to different people. What does culture mean to you?
- How would you characterize the culture of CUIM?
- How does this vision of culture within CUIM apply to your work, or your membership, in the program? Can you give me a specific example or illustration?
- How does CUIM present these aspects of culture in their organization?

I'd like to talk to you about online presence via social media accounts.

- Are you a social media user, and if so, how do you use it?
- What do you think of organizations that have social media accounts?
- Are you a follower of CUIM on Facebook and/or Twitter? If so, how often do you post or respond to messages?
- From your standpoint, how does CUIM create a social presence on *social media*?
- What in your view are the *first steps* necessary for online presence to occur via social media?
- What challenges do you see for organizations to have online presence via social media?
- Do you think CUIM's social media reflects the CUIM culture as it is right now?
- Has an online presence made a change in CUIM? If so, how? If not, why do you think it hasn't?

Now I'd like to talk to you specifically about communication types and patterns on social media.

- What are the best ways in which CUIM can network or create relationships within the CUIM culture?
- Are there specific types of messages or communication patterns that have failed or won't work in this effort?
- How do you see the balance between offering or presenting *information* and engaging in *social interaction or collaboration* with regard to promoting intramural culture?
- To what extent should CUIM be engaged in interaction or collaboration with the members of the accounts, in your view? Please explain.
- Imagine that you're giving advice to other intramural sport programs without social media accounts. What advice would you give him in terms the best kinds of communication to interact or collaborate with members of the organization to promote intramural culture?

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